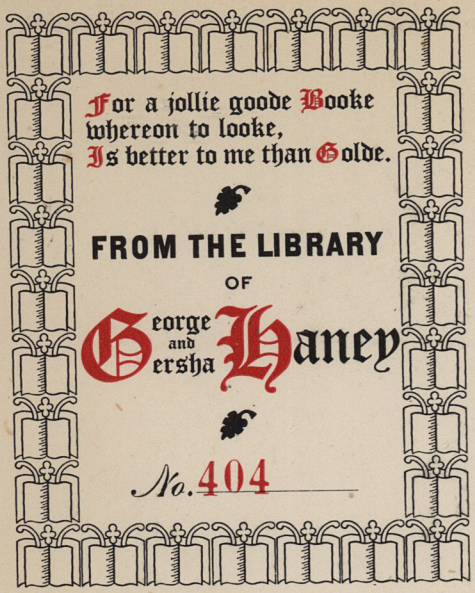
The CLOCK and the KEY

by ARTHUR H. VESEY


For a jollie goode Booke
whereon to looke,
Is better to me than Golde.
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THE CLOCK AND THE KEY

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "A CHEQUE FOR THREE THOUSAND"
"A PEDIGREE IN PAWN," ETC.

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TO

M. B. L.

THE CLOCK AND THE KEY

CHAPTER I

Our gondola, far out on the lagoon, hardly moved. But neither Jacqueline nor I, under the red and white striped awning, cared much, and Pietro even dared to light a cigarette.

Silver-gray dome, campanile, and spire gleamed through the golden haze that hung over the enchanted city. A great stillness was over all—only the ripple of Pietro's lazy oar, and faintly, very faintly, bells chiming.

"I have dreamed of it," said Jacqueline. "Only the dreams were such futile things compared with the reality. I close my eyes. I open them quickly. I am afraid it will all be blown away, vanish in a single moment. But there it is, your dear, dear Venice—the green garden away up there; the white Riva, basking in the sunlight; the rosy palace; and the red and orange sails, drifting slowly along. We shall return to the Piazza presently, and St. Mark's will be

there, and the pigeons, and the white palaces. Oh, there is not a false note to destroy the perfect charm of Venice, not one."

I aroused myself. While Jacqueline had been intoxicated with the beauty of Venice, I had been intoxicated with the beauty of Jacqueline. I must say something, and something prosaic, or I should be forgetting myself.

"Oh, favored of the gods," I murmured, "to be dead to unpleasant sights and sounds. And yet, not in Paradise, not even in this Paradise, are they quite shut out. Look, there is a penny steamer making its blatant way from the Molo to the Giudecca. And that far-off rumble is the express crossing the long bridge from Mestre. And, whew, that's the twelve-o'clock whistle at the Arsenal. There you have three notes of progress and civilization in this city of dead dreams and dead hopes."

Jacqueline turned in her seat and looked at me curiously.

"My dear Richard, will you answer me one question?"

"Gladly, if it is not too difficult. But don't forget, Jacqueline, Venice is not exactly an intellectual center."

"Then tell me, please, why it is that when you were in New York, hardly two months ago, you

talked so charmingly of your Venetian skies and still lagoons that you quite made me long for them. But now, when I am at last under one of your wonderful skies and on your wonderful lagoon, instead of helping me to love it all, and sympathizing with me, you insist on the horrible things that clash—things I would so gladly forget for the happy moment."

"Because," I answered gravely, "I must not allow myself to forget that one happy moment is not a lifetime."

"Really, I don't understand you."

She looked at me frankly—too frankly—that was the trouble. I hesitated. In spite of the flimsy excuses her aunt had suspiciously erected, I had brought Jacqueline alone with me here to tell her why I must not allow myself to love her; and, I may add, to hear her laugh to delicious scorn my reasons. And yet I hesitated. Sometimes I felt she cared for me. But if I answered her question truthfully, I risked a cruel awakening.

"Do you know how long I have been living in Venice?" I asked presently, with apparent irrelevance.

"Three years, is it not?"

"That is a long time to be dreaming and loafing, isn't it?"

"Yes." Her eyes looked gravely out on the lagoon.

"And it seems to you hardly a manly, strenuous life for a man of—shall we say—thirty years of age, to spend three years rocking himself to sleep, as it were, in a gondola?"

"No," she laughed nervously; "hardly a strenuous life."

"Such a life as that," I persisted, "must contrast rather unfavorably with the lives of men you know in New York, for example?"

"I suppose one may spend one's life well even here in Venice."

I laughed rather bitterly.

"One gets up at ten," I murmured. "One has coffee in bed, and dawdles over the papers. A gentle, gentle walk till twelve—to the garden, perhaps—oh, you can walk miles in Venice, though most tourists think not. At twelve, breakfast at Florian's on the Piazza. A long smoke, perhaps a row to the Lido and a swim, if it is summer. At five another long smoke and incidentally a long drink on the Piazza again, and the band. At seven, dinner at the Grundewald, a momentous affair, when one hesitates ten minutes over the menu. Then another long smoke out in the lagoon, under the stars, with the lights of Venice in the distance, and in the distance, too,

the herd of tourists, splitting their gloves in ecstasy over the efforts of the tenor robusto under the balconies of the Grand Hotel. And then, wicked, dreamless slumber. The next morning, the same thing over again."

Jacqueline gasped. She looked at me with a curious intentness, and I was uneasy under her gaze. I knew she was noting quite ruthlessly that I was getting fat.

"It is difficult to keep quite fit in Venice," I pleaded.

"And you really have done that for three years," she said at last, almost in admiration. It was as if I were a strange animal doing clever tricks.

"For three years, barring flights to New York and London in January and February, and a few weeks in the Tyrol during July and August," I answered steadily.

"And you really like it?" she asked, still wonderingly.

"I can never imagine myself liking it again. I have despised myself since last Tuesday."

"Since last Tuesday!" she echoed, and then blushed. It was on Tuesday that Jacqueline and her aunt had arrived in Venice. "But you are not answering my first question."

"I am answering it in a roundabout way," I

replied dreamily. Then quite abruptly, "You didn't know me until I was at Oxford, did you?"

"No."

"I was sent to Eton when I was a sickly, timid little chap of fourteen. I had had a lonely life of it in New York. My mother was so afraid I should have a good time like other boys, and shout and play and talk with an American accent, that she chained me to a priggish English tutor, who took me for solemn walks in the park for recreation. I was hardly any better off than the pale-faced little idiots you see marching about Rome and Palermo two by two, dressed up in ridiculous uniforms of broadcloth, and carrying canes—not so well off, for there are many of them, and only one slovenly priest. But my keeper had me all to himself. Think of it, I never held a baseball in my little fist. Imagine that kind of a youngster set down in the midst of half a thousand lusty young English schoolboys, and an American at that."

"Poor little homesick boy," she murmured. "And then?"

"Just five years of being shunned and moping and long solitary rows on the river, and dreams bad for a boy of my years—just a long stretch of that sort of thing, that was my life at the public school.

"At Oxford it was pretty much the same. I pulled through in a listless sort of fashion and got my degree. But the habits of boyhood told now. I found it harder than ever to get into things. I found myself more and more the mere spectator of life—not a happy existence, nor a good foundation for an American to begin the duties of life with."

"I should think not," said Jacqueline severely. If she had pity for the lonely little boy, she had no mercy for the man. "And so because you idled through college and liked it, you came here to Venice to idle away the rest of your life?" she asked with some scorn.

"Well, it was hardly so deliberate as that," I said patiently. "No, I went back to America, and for the first time came face to face with my father. At least it was the first time that he had taken the trouble to speak to me in a heart-to-heart sort of way. You know my father well, so I needn't expatiate on his virtues."

Jacqueline smiled. But no malice hovered on her lips as on mine. American women are supposed to demand much of their husbands and fathers. But at least they respect the husbands and fathers who toil that they may play. So she answered primly:

"I have always found your father a most in-

teresting man. I know he loves you in his way. That you have so little ambition is the bitter disappointment of his life. He has often spoken of you to me."

"Yes, yes," I said hurriedly, "no doubt he loves me in his own fashion. But we hardly understand each other. The morning after I landed from England, after I had taken my degree, he called me into his office and asked me without any preliminaries what I thought I was fit for. I told him that I really hadn't any idea. He thumped his great fist on his desk and roared: 'So far, young man, your mother has had her turn. She's mammied you, and made a fool of you with your English education and English accent. Now it's my turn. Go back to Germany. Stay there two years and come back a chemist. I want you to help me in the factory.'

"I never dreamed of opposing him. I was rather relieved to get out of his presence. So I took the check that he handed to me, and shook him dutifully by the hand. 'Good-by,' he said, 'and when I say a chemist, I mean a good chemist. If you aren't that, you needn't bother to come back at all.' The next morning I engaged passage for Bremen."

"The rest I know about," said Jacqueline, looking at her watch.

"I dare say, only I should like you to understand it from my point of view. I went to Berlin. My name was entered on the roll of students of the university. I drank a lot of beer, but I studied very little chemistry. At the end of my two years' probation, I began to think with apprehension of my father's parting words: 'And a good chemist, or you needn't trouble to come back.'

"And then, one day, when I was quite at a loss what to do, I received word that my mother had died suddenly. She left me a small fortune.

"I dreaded more than ever to return to my father. Why should I? I began to ask myself. Why should I? echoed my one friend.

"This friend was a wizened, eccentric, boastful little man, but with an undying enthusiasm for the rare and the beautiful. He spoke cunning words to entice me: 'Your father's idea of a successful life is one of work and yet more work—of tasks and habits that bind one more and more inexorably as the years go on. This is not success at all, but the direst failure. A life made up of habits and tasks that safely steer one through one's existence, minute by minute, is a life with all the excitement and keen delight and ecstasy left out. To live such a life is to be a machine and no man.

"'Come,' he said, 'with me to Venice. I will show you how to live. Why should you go back to America and the hideous? There are millions of fools to labor doggedly—to keep the world a-going—why should you be dragged into the ranks of the slaves to the lash? There are thousands to agonize and strive, to create the beautiful—and to fail, terribly. Why should you be dragged into the ranks of those slaves to an ideal? There are hundreds to make the world better. Why should you be a slave to conscience? But there are so few to make a fine art of living. Be one of them. Enjoy perfectly. Enjoy wisely. Life may be for you something so rare and beautiful that the horrible and the vulgar shall not exist for you.' I listened to him. I came to Venice. Here I am."

"There is something rather fine about it all," said Jacqueline wistfully. "But there's sophistry somewhere. And it seems brutally selfish."

"Sophistry! Selfish! How subtle the sophistry and selfishness I alone can tell. Dear Jacqueline, I had left one thing out of my calculations in building this fool's paradise."

"And that?" Jacqueline looked troubled. I know she pitied me.

"I had forgotten that one may love."

I leaned over toward her. Regardless of

Pietro, who, I knew, was squinting through the red and white striped awning, I took her hand. "Dear Jacqueline, do you think that it is too late for me to begin again?"

Jacqueline was silent. She withdrew her hand gently. I had felt it tremble in mine.

"Do you see now that I am answering your question?" I asked. "When I was in New York, and knew at last that I should always love you, I had to keep reminding myself that *this* was my world. I had set before myself an ideal. I must be faithful to it. So, now, when you are in Venice, I have tried to remind myself just as strongly that you come from the world of the penny steamboat and factory—a workaday world—a relentless world. In that world men tear and rend one another for a name, for a position. Each one is for himself, ruthless of others, unscrupulous often. Each one strives madly for something that is just out of his reach. That is the world you come from. I have reminded myself of it over and over. But it's no use. I can't keep silent. I must speak. Jacqueline, I love you."

She sat motionless. Her eyes looked out on the lagoon. Then she clasped her knees, and looked at me with a curious intentness. When she did speak, it was so slowly, so decisively that her words sounded like an inexorable fate.

"My dear Richard, you are an extraordinary man. You are one of the rare specimens who hold a perfectly impossible ideal. When you fail to attain that ideal, you frankly abandon yourself to materialism—a materialism that smothers you. You have not even attempted to play the man. It is incredible that you should deliberately lay yourself down to loll on a flowery bed of ease for three years. Your very last words about my poor world show how great a gulf is fixed between you and me. Yes, I am of that world. I glory in it. But you sneer at the very qualities you lack. That is so easy, and, forgive me, so weak. You call my poor world ruthless. But often ruthlessness, yes, and unscrupulousness even, go with strength. The man I love must have a touch of this relentlessness you despise. Better that he be unscrupulous than weak. And as for patience, surely to be greatly patient is to be greatly strong. But you, my dear Dick, you are a piece of bric-à-brac, you and your ideals. You should be under a glass case. You are too *précieux* for the struggle in the world you shrink from. Return your love? Impossible. You have done nothing to deserve it."

I could not speak. She had told me the truth. Presently she looked at me. Then she touched my arm lightly.

"I have hurt you," she pleaded.

"Well, why not?" I answered roughly. "It is the truth. But, Jacqueline, is your answer quite final? If I plunge into this struggle—if I show you that I too can strive and achieve things for the woman I love, if not for myself, will you let me tell you again that I love you?"

"Can the leopard change his spots?" she asked lightly.

"That remains to be seen. Let me prove to you that I am not merely the dilettante that you see on the surface. If I have not cared to succeed before, perhaps it was because there was nothing or no one to work for. If I show you that I really have those qualities that you demand and think I lack, will you let me tell you again that I love you?"

"What could you do to show that?" asked Jacqueline softly.

"I could go back to New York to-morrow. I could join my father in business."

"To New York to-morrow!" she said in dismay.

"Yes," I cried joyously. I had caught the note of dismay.

"But I dare not advise you to do that. I could not take that responsibility unless I loved you.

I do not love you. But if you are not fitted for business, you would surely fail."

"Would you discourage me in the attempt to do what you have condemned me for not doing?" I asked with impatience.

"It may be that here in Venice is a task."

"In Venice? Impossible."

"You told me the other day that you had once thought of writing up the legends of Venice. You said they had really never been done well. Why not attempt that?"

"Oh, that!" I exclaimed discontentedly.

"And why not?"

"It must be an entire change of life—of habits and ambition and tastes. Why not attempt something big while I am about it?"

"My dear Richard," insisted Jacqueline gently, "it makes no difference how obscure one's task is. It may be even a useless task, only one must show patience and strength in the performance of it."

"Jacqueline, you are giving me hope."

She held up her gloved hand, smiling.

"No, I give you no hope. Nor do I give you reason to despair. I do not love you, now. I could not love such a one as you. Whether I could love you if you were different—if you had ambition and stamina—I can not tell."

"I shall yet make you love me, Jacqueline."

Our eyes met for one instant, then hers fell before my steady gaze.

"Will you please tell the gondolier to row faster? I shall be late for luncheon, and I have an appointment at three."

"Then I sha'n't see you this afternoon?"

"Perhaps. If you care to accompany my aunt and myself on a little expedition."

"I shall be delighted. And where?"

"To an old Venetian palace on the Grand Canal. We are to inspect it from garret to basement. A dealer in antiquities is to take us there. He is to buy the contents of the palace as they stand. You know my aunt, Mrs. Gordon, is never so happy as when buying some useless piece of bric-à-brac."

"Beware of the dealer in bric-à-brac here in Venice. He is a Jew, your dealer—be sure of that."

"Oh, no, he is not. Aunt and I know him well. He is an American."

"His name?"

"St. Hilary. He has an immense shop on Fifth Avenue."

"St. Hilary!" I exclaimed, "and he is here in Venice!"

"Do you know him?"

"Why, this St. Hilary is the man I told you of," I answered slowly, "who first charmed me into coming to Venice. He is responsible for my wasting these past three years. I feel a grudge against him for that. He owes me some reparation. Yes; I shall be interested in seeing your palace with St. Hilary as guide. When shall I meet you?"

"Outside Florian's, on the Piazza at three. But you have not yet aroused your gondolier."

I poked Pietro with my walking-stick. Pietro flung away his cigarette and bent to his oar. The gondola, like a thing of life, leaped joyously toward the Molo.

CHAPTER II

My rooms were in a wonderful old palace in the unfashionable quarter of the Giudecca. From the windows, precisely opposite the Salute, I had the finest view in Venice. That made them worth while. But the principal charm of the location for me lay in the fact that here the ubiquitous tripper rarely puts foot.

At a quarter to three I boarded a penny steamer from the Fondamenta della Croce, the broad sunny quay in front of my palace, and crossed over to the Molo. It was the first time in three years that I had used this humble craft. The penny steamer, be it understood, was a part of the new *régime*. It stood for hustle and democratic haste, the qualities in which dear Jacqueline had found me so sadly lacking.

It gave me an immense satisfaction—this little voyage. I paid my soldo to the shabby, uniformed conductor; I watched him uncurl the rope from the post; I heard the steersman shout down his hollow tube the directions to the engineer in his cubby-hole below; I seated myself between an unshaven priest and a frowsy old woman

with a basket of eels; and it all appealed to me as fresh and interesting.

The world was very bright that afternoon. The sky had never seemed so blue. There was something for me to do—what, I did not know precisely (for I had not taken Jacqueline's suggestion very seriously), but somewhere I should find my task, and so win Jacqueline's complete love and regard. In the meanwhile I was to see her.

I leaped ashore, the first of the passengers, and walked briskly across the Piazzetta. I saw them immediately at one of the little black tables outside of Florian's—St. Hilary in the center, and Mrs. Gordon and Jacqueline on either side. St. Hilary was talking—as usual.

He evinced no surprise at seeing me. That was not his way. He did not even shake hands. He merely saluted me with his rattan cane, and continued to talk—as usual.

"Then it is the beauty of Venice that impresses you both?" he was saying. "The beauty! I am weary of the cry. Let me tell you that there is something infinitely more appealing to one than beauty in Venice, if one knows precisely how to look for it and where."

"And what is that?" asked Mrs. Gordon, as St. Hilary paused.

"It is its mystery," he said impressively.

"Its mystery!" repeated vaguely Jacqueline's aunt. "And why its mystery?"

"Listen. I wish you to understand. It is night. You are quite alone—you and your gondolier. And it is late—very late. All Venice is asleep. You drift slowly down the Grand Canal. You hear nothing but the weird cry, '*stai-li oh,*' as a gondolier approaches a corner. Above are the stars, and in the dark waters about you are stars—a thousand of them—reflected in a thousand rivulets. On this side and on that—dumb as the dead—are the despoiled palaces. They suffer in silence. They are desecrated. Their glory is departed. Some of them are lodging-houses, a glass-factory, a post-office, a shop of cheap and false antiquities. But Pesaro and Contarini once dwelt in them. Titian and Giorgione adorned their walls. Within was the splendor of the Renaissance—cloth of gold—priceless tapestries—bronzes—pictures—treasures of the East—of Constantinople, of far-off Tartary. Everything of beauty in the whole world found its way at some time within those barred gates.

"But where is it now—all that treasure, that beauty? Has every temple been ravaged? Has the vandal prowled in the very holy of holies?

Are only the bare walls left? Only the very skeletons of all that pride of the flesh? Or, somewhere, hidden perhaps centuries ago—in some dark cranny—in some secret chamber—is there some forgotten masterpiece—some beauty of cunning hand, some jewel patiently waiting for one to pluck it from its obscurity? There must be. I know there is. Do you hear? I say I *know*. There, madame, you have for me the mystery of Venice."

"For you," placidly replied Mrs. Gordon, "simply because you are a dealer in antiquities. But why is Venice in that regard more mysterious than other great cities?"

I thought Mrs. Gordon right. St. Hilary's enthusiasm was far-fetched. The dapper little man, with his black, snapping eyes, his face the color of parchment, and lined as the palm of one's hand, agile as a puppet on strings, neat as a tailor's model, was in earnest, absurdly in earnest, in this idle, quaint fancy of his.

"Perhaps so," he sighed. "Say that it is the passion of the collector that talks and not the sober judgment of the dealer. And yet, and yet, it is this hope that sends me to impossible places in Persia, to Burma. Yes; it has brought me now to Venice."

"To Venice!" I cried, astonished. "You

allow yourself to be mastered by a whim, as vague, as visionary as this?"

"My dear Hume, perhaps this whim, as you call it, is not vague or visionary to me," he replied quietly.

"But," I expostulated, "you have no proofs of your treasure. Why is it not behind the glass cases in St. Mark's yonder? Why are not your canvases in the museums? Why are not your antiquities in the shops?"

He looked at me with a strangely thoughtful expression.

"What we have never had we do not miss," he mused. "No one missed the Venus de Milo, or the Frieze of the Parthenon, or the Kohinoor. Yet we call them to-day three of the wonders of the world."

"Because there are but three of them," I said impatiently "I am afraid you must look far and wide before you find the lucky fourth."

"No doubt," he said indifferently, "no doubt." And then with apparent irrelevance, "Now one would not think that crowns were so easily lost."

"And have they been?" I asked curiously.

"Only the other day eight were found at one digging, not far from Toledo. They had been lost for a thousand years. There was a find for

you. Then the crown of the Emperor of Austria, the holy crown, the *szenta korona*, has been lost and found no less than three times. The last time (not half a century ago) it disappeared after the defeat of Kossuth. Some said it had been taken to London; some, that it was broken up and the jewels sold in Constantinople. But for a few florins a peasant returned it as mysteriously as it had disappeared. Foolish peasant!"

"Mr. St. Hilary," expostulated Mrs. Gordon severely, "you would not have had him do otherwise?"

"I suppose not. But upon my word, sometimes I think that one might as well go in for big things as for little. There is the *Gnaga Boh*, the Dragon Lord, the most perfect ruby in the world. A half-witted creature, the widow of King Theebaw, wears it. We are great friends, that old hag and I, and I could have stolen it from her a thousand times. Some day perhaps she will give it to me. And that notorious Indian prince, Gwaikor of Baroda, has half a dozen stones of price. He, too, is a crony of mine. Nothing would be easier than to steal one of them."

"My dear Mr. St. Hilary," again interrupted Mrs. Gordon, "surely you do not contemplate burglary?"

"That is precisely the trouble," he complained mournfully, "I have a conscience. But findings are certainly keepings."

"Ah, but it must be so difficult to find one's findings," said Jacqueline quaintly.

"Not always. Have you never heard how the Hermes of Praxiteles was discovered?"

She shook her head.

"Pausanias, an old Greek historian, wrote of that statue about a thousand years ago—how he had seen it at Olympia. There was the passage for all the world to read. He wrote precisely what there was to dig for—precisely where one was to dig. But did any one believe him? Not for a thousand years. But when, after a thousand years, a party of Germans made up their minds that perhaps there was something in the story, and dug in Olympia as he told them, there was their Hermes waiting for them. You see one may have information as to where lies one's treasure sometimes. But so few of us have faith."

"And have you your information as well as your abundant faith, St. Hilary?" I inquired with mock solicitude.

At this idle question, his heavily lidded eyes opened wide. The pupils dilated. A challenge flashed from their blue depths. I stared at him.

But almost immediately the heavy lids drooped again.

"All this is extremely interesting, Mr. St. Hilary," said Jacqueline. "But is it not rather wide from our Venetian palace? Why do we wait?"

"Simply, my dear young lady, because the owner happens to be of a religious turn of mind; and at this moment, I believe, is confessing his sins in San Marco's yonder."

"Who is the owner of the palace?" inquired Mrs. Gordon. "And why does he wish to sell its contents?"

"The owner is a duke, the Duca da Sestos, and he wishes to sell because he is as impecunious as the rest of his tribe."

"A duke!" cried Mrs. Gordon. "How interesting! And what kind of a duke is this gentleman?"

"Of the very flower of the Italian nobility. He is a prince of good fellows, a dashing cavalier, handsome as a young god, and twenty-six."

"How *very* interesting," repeated Mrs. Gordon, and looked at Jacqueline.

The look troubled me. Jacqueline herself seemed annoyed at it. She turned to St. Hilary.

"And have you any other treasures up your sleeve, Mr. St. Hilary?"

"My dear young lady, shall I give you an inventory of one collection I know about? I promise to make all your mouths water.

"To begin with, there is a balas-ruby, known as El Spigo, or the ear of corn. In the fifteenth century it was valued at the enormous sum of two hundred and fifty thousand ducats. Then there is the jewel, El Lupo, the wolf. It is one large diamond and three pearls. These two stones would take the eye of the vulgar. But imagine a beryl, twice as big as your thumb-nail, and on it the portrait of the pope, Clement VII, carved by none other than the great Cellini."

"I will buy it at any price," cried Jacqueline.

"Then," continued St. Hilary, touching his forefinger lightly, "there is a pale-red ruby. The stone is indifferent. But it is a cameo, and the likeness carved on it is that of Ludovico Il Moro, the Duke of Milan. Domenico de' Camei is the artist, and they called him de' Camei because he was the greatest carver of cameos in the world."

"That is mine," said Mrs. Gordon, her eyes on San Marco.

"To continue, there is a turquoise cameo, half as large as the palm of your hand, and on it is carved the Triumph of Augustus. Thirty figures are on that stone. There is an Isis head in malachite. The only other to compare with it

is in the Hermitage collection at St. Petersburg. Few portraits of Beatrice d'Este exist. One of them is carved on one of my stones, and is known as a diamond portrait. Imagine a thin plate of diamonds, evenly polished on both sides with little facets on the edges. The diamonds make, as it were, the glass frame of the portrait itself, which is carved on lapis lazuli by the great Ambrosius Caradossa."

"That," I interrupted, "must be mine."

"I must not forget two curious poison-rings —one with a sliding panel; the other, still more dangerous, a lion with sharp claws—the claws hollowed and communicating with a small poison-receptacle. We must be careful how we finger that ring when we take our treasure out of the casket. Yes; and the casket itself is worth looking at. By an ingenious system of clockwork, the cover could not be opened in less than twelve hours."

"And where, where are all these treasures?" demanded Mrs. Gordon, taking her eyes from the cathedral for the moment.

"My dear lady, so far as I know, they are here in Venice."

"In Venice!" I cried.

"But, unfortunately, they disappeared nearly five hundred years ago."

There was a chorus of disappointment and reproaches. Mrs. Gordon again impatiently turned her attention to San Marco.

"And there is absolutely no clue to them?" demanded Jacqueline.

"No clue, dear lady," he murmured, spreading wide his hands.

"But at least tell us whose the gems were?" I asked.

"Ah, yes, that at least I can tell you. The gems belonged to Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan and wife of Ludovico Il Moro. She pawned them to the Doge of Venice to raise money for her husband's army."

"And they have absolutely disappeared?" I insisted.

"As if they had never existed. But they do exist, and here in Venice. Think of it! In Venice. And now, perhaps, my dear Hume, you can understand the fascination of Venice for me." He sighed deeply.

"But why are you reminded of them so particularly this afternoon?" I persisted curiously.

"Because we are going to see the box that is said to have contained the casket."

"In the palace of our duke?" asked Jacqueline's aunt.

St. Hilary bowed. "In the palace of our duke, madame."

"And how did it come there?" I asked in my turn.

"It is said that the duke's ancestor, a great goldsmith in Venice——"

He ended his sentence abruptly. "Here comes our duke," he said.

I looked up. The dealer in antiquities had not exaggerated his charms. He was tall. His figure was as noble as his carriage. His hand rested lightly on his sword-hilt. His bold eyes, of a piercing blue, searched Jacqueline's lovely face. He had the all-conquering air of a young god. His eyes wandered to mine. We looked steadily at each other. We measured each other. Instinctively I distrusted him.

St. Hilary made the introductions. "I have asked my friends to go with me. I have not taken too great a liberty?" he said in French.

"Not at all," assured the duke. "I am only sorry I have kept the ladies waiting. My launch is waiting at the Molo. Shall we go at once?"

CHAPTER III

The Palazzo da Sestos was for many years one of the sights of the Grand Canal. It is not more beautiful than a score of others. Its sole distinction lay in the fact that its faded green shutters had been barred for something more than half a century. Other palaces are closed for a year—for ten years. But for fifty years no butcher or baker boy had pulled the rusty bell-rope at the little rear street—no gondola had paused at its moss-grown steps. It had acquired something of mystery. It was pointed out to the tourist as inevitably as the glass-factory of Salviati.

But to-day the wide iron gates stood open. The steam-launch swept between the palace steps and the huge spiles, still proud in their very decrepitude, crowned with the corno and adorned with the da Sestos coat of arms. A servant, shaking and bobbing his white old head, stood on the marble steps that dipped down to the water.

We entered the echoing hall, and an indescribable odor of damp mortar and dust made us

cough. Something scurried across the red and white marble flags. A bat, blinded by the sudden light, swirled about the hall in circles. Mrs. Gordon shivered and clutched the duke's arm. Jacqueline gathered up her skirts carefully about her. There was something unclean and uncanny about the place.

The lofty hall ran through the palace. Beyond was another iron gate, opening on the garden, now a wild confusion of clambering grape-vines and ivy and myrtle, that rioted up the crumbling walls and choked and twined themselves about the broken statuary and the yellow-stained well-curb. On either side of the hall were stone benches, and over each long seat the da Sestos coat of arms again, the strange insignia of a protruding hand clasping a huge key. Doors to the right and left led to the Magazzini, or storerooms, in which, years ago, when Venice was the mistress of the world in commerce, the *nobili* stored their merchandise. St. Hilary, who had unconsciously taken the lead, cast a disdainful eye on the bare walls, and hurried to the stairway.

At the landing we paused. Two massively carved doors faced us, the one opening on the Sala Grande, the other to a long succession of

small reception-rooms, leading one out of the other. Luigi tremblingly unlocked the doors of the Sala, and threw them back with ceremony, holding high above his head a flickering candle.

We stood without, peering into the darkness, while the old man tottered across the vast room and unbarred a shutter. The candle shone pale in the light of day. He pushed open a window, and a faint breeze touched our cheeks. One breathed again. The sun streamed on the shining floor of colored cement, gaily embedded with little pieces of marble. I looked about me.

Great yellow sheets shrouded everything—the tapestries, the pictures, the furniture. St. Hilary tore the sheets down impatiently, Luigi looking from master to dealer in troubled amazement and indignation. At last the noble room stood revealed. The little frivolous company of smartly dressed men and women in flannels and muslins seemed strangely like intruders in this great apartment of faded magnificence and mournful grandeur.

Flemish tapestries covered the vast expanse of the walls. Throne-chairs in Genoese velvet and brocade and stamped leather, each with the inevitable arms in gold appliqué, were ranged formally side by side. There was a magnificent

center-table, the heavy malachite top with its mosaic center and Etruscan border, supported by four elaborately carved winged goddesses. There were antique Spanish and Italian cabinets of tortoise-shell and ivory and ebony. At either end of the room were two cavernous fireplaces, the pilasters covered with exquisitely carved cherubs and Raphaelesque scrolls. Vases of verde; trousseau-chests of ebony; consol-tables of bronze and ormulu; jewel-boxes of jasper and lapis lazuli; clocks of bronze and Sienna marble; marble busts; portières of silk and velvet; Florentine mirrors; Venetian chandeliers of pink and white and blue Venetian glass—all belonged to the Venice of the Renaissance—to Venice in its splendor.

"I suppose," said the duke, looking about, "this old room has had its chairs and tables standing precisely as you see them for two hundred years."

"And, now," said Mrs. Gordon reproachfully, "you dare to despoil it? Were I you, it would sadden me to sell at a price these dumb things to that terrible dealer, darting about with his notebook from treasure to treasure."

"*Per Baccho!*" laughed the duke. "Why should I have any sentiment for a place and for things that are as strange to me as to you? They

have only recently become mine, and that by an accident. If Luigi, now, were having his say, it might be different, eh, old man?"

Luigi had been dogging the footsteps of the dealer, replacing the coverings. He looked up anxiously.

"What! his Excellency is to sell this palace?" he faltered.

"All," said the duke lightly, and ignored him. "You must know, ladies, that the uncle, by whose timely death I inherited the palace, was the last Venetian of our name. He never set foot in this palace, I am told. He lived abroad. The traditions of these Venetians were not his. Nor are they mine. I prefer to make traditions of my own. I am from Turin. There, one is at least in the world. There, one has ambitions for power and glory."

"With ambition you will arrive far," said Mrs. Gordon adoringly.

"But these Venetians, bah, I know them!" he continued. "To gossip a little, to dawdle over their silly newspapers at the Café Quadri—to eat, to drink, to flirt—that is their dream of happiness. They are rocked to sleep in their wonderful gondolas. They drift on the smooth surface of their sluggish canals out to the great sea of oblivion. No. The silent waterways of this

melancholy, faded Venice are not exactly paths of glory."

"No," said Jacqueline, and perhaps unconsciously she looked at me.

I deserved the reproachful glance, no doubt. I should have borne it meekly enough had not the duke noticed it as well as myself. As he led the way through the reception-rooms, he stared curiously at me, and then at Jacqueline. He smiled. My vague dislike became more definite.

These reception-rooms were monotonously alike. Our interest began to flag. But the indefatigable dealer of antiquities had seen enough to awaken his enthusiasm. It was natural that he should peer and pry. It was his business, I suppose, to finger brocades, to try the springs of chairs. But there was not a trousseau-chest whose cover he did not lift, an armoire or cabinet that he did not look within. I thought his eagerness bordered almost on vulgarity, until I remembered the box that held the da Sestos cabinet. He was looking for it, of course.

At last he gave a little cry of satisfaction. He turned to Mrs. Gordon. We had reached the last of the *camerini.*

"You will remember, madame, I was telling you an extraordinary story of the lost gems of the Beatrice d'Este. It is true that I can not

show you the jewels. Nor the casket that contained the jewels. But if it would interest you to see the box that contained the casket, behold it!"

He touched lightly with his cane a steel chest that stood on a consol-table.

"And how are you to prove this?" asked Mrs. Gordon, a little skeptically.

St. Hilary pointed to the cover. On it was engraved: "*Giovanni da Sestos fecit, 1525.*"

"A da Sestos made the casket for the jewels!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, glancing at the duke.

"It is a matter of history," replied St. Hilary.

"Jewels!" cried the duke. "What is this about a da Sestos making a casket for jewels?"

"I was amusing the ladies this afternoon with the story of the mysterious disappearance of the D'Este gems. As a matter of fact, they did not merely disappear, Mrs. Gordon. They were stolen, and stolen, if the legend be true, from one of his Grace's ancestors."

"An ancestor of mine?" cried the duke. "Impossible."

"He was a marvelous artist and clock-maker," returned St. Hilary coolly. "He was the first Venetian of his name to become famous, though I believe his end was rather tragic."

"You seem to know a great deal about the

affairs of my family, Mr. St. Hilary. It is strange that I have never heard of this ancestor and his casket."

"Not so strange," replied the dealer, "seeing that nearly five hundred years have passed since then. As to the casket, it is a curiosity, and a matter of history. There are few curiosities in the world that escape the notice of us dealers in antiquities. It is our business to know about them."

"Perhaps you will enlighten me as to this strange story," said the duke.

"Some day," promised St. Hilary carelessly. "Any day, in fact, that you have half an hour to smoke a cigar with me at Florian's." Then he turned to old Luigi, who was nervously fumbling with his keys. "Have we seen everything? All the rooms?"

The old man bowed. "Everything, signore."

"That door, where does it lead?"

Luigi pressed down the handle and threw it open.

"Good heavens, Mr. St. Hilary!" cried the duke, "are you looking for the gems you have been romancing about? Surely by this time you have seen everything."

The dealer paid little heed to the duke's remonstrances. He was fingering the tapestries. The

duke turned to the ladies with a gesture of annoyance.

"Shall we now leave this mad dealer to his own devices? It would please me very much if both of you would choose some souvenir of our delightful afternoon. I am reluctant to let the terrible American have everything. Shall we go to the reception-rooms again? It is there that we shall find the more interesting pieces of bric-à-brac."

The duke and the ladies left the sala, old Luigi leading the way. Myself his Grace had ignored completely.

I turned listlessly to join St. Hilary. To my astonishment he absolutely disappeared. I walked the full length of the sala, quite mystified; for I had observed only one exit.

As I stood in a dim corner of the vast apartment one of the tapestries opposite shook. St. Hilary emerged from behind it. He glanced around the room an instant, and then, thinking himself unseen, he walked rapidly into the reception-room after the others.

My curiosity was thoroughly aroused. I lifted the tapestry in my turn and felt along the wall behind it.

Sudddenly this wall gave way to the pressure of my hand. I had pushed open a door.

I found myself in a narrow chamber, hardly larger than a coat-closet. I struck a match. But before I could explore the interior, the tapestry was lifted once more, and Lugi appeared, the lighted candle still in his hand.

"What is the signore doing in there?" he demanded with an anxiety that seemed to me rather uncalled for.

"I thought that you had shown all the apartments, Luigi?"

"But his Excellency will be annoyed if he sees you here," persisted the old servant.

"Not at all," said a cold voice, and the duke entered, followed by the others.

"My dear Richard," laughed Jacqueline, "this is deliciously mysterious. So you have actually discovered a hidden chamber?"

"Quite what one might expect in an old Venetian palace," added Mrs. Gordon. "Now if you have found Mr. St. Hilary's jewels, it will be perfect."

"I doubt if my friend Hume has wit enough to have made the discovery that it is nothing but a bare chamber," cried the dealer, darting at me a look of intense annoyance.

"Oh, it is no discovery of mine," I said calmly. "I have merely followed where St. Hilary led."

"As a dealer in antiquities I am naturally in-

terested in curiosities, even in curious chambers."

"All the same, your knowledge of my palace is rather extraordinary—even for a dealer in antiquities," cried the duke.

St. Hilary took the lighted candle from the servant.

"If you were a better Venetian," he retorted, "and were familiar with the archives of the Frari, you would know that the Inquisition of Venice had plans of every palace in the city. I happen to have examined them. That is all."

"But your Excellency will observe," said old Luigi unconcernedly, "that the room is quite empty."

"Yes, yes," agreed the dealer, pushing us gently without.

"No, not quite," I said, looking at him keenly. "What is this on the shelf here?"

"A clock!" exclaimed Jacqueline.

CHAPTER IV

It stood on a stone shelf built out from the wall as high as one could reach.

"Tut, tut, a broken-down clock," cried St. Hilary contemptuously. "Nothing could be more useless and uninteresting," and he blew out the candle.

We trooped into the sala again.

"And now, Duke, having thoroughly explored your house beautiful, even to the recesses of the hidden and mysterious chamber, I'm quite prepared to make you an offer at your convenience."

"There is all the time in the world for that, Mr. St. Hilary," replied the duke impatiently. "The ladies have not yet chosen their souvenirs. What gift will you honor me by accepting?" He turned to Jacqueline.

She hesitated, and looked at Mrs. Gordon.

"My dear Jacqueline," encouraged her aunt, "I am sure Mr. St. Hilary will not make his offer much less for anything that you might choose."

"No," said the dealer, making figures in his note-book, "I have quite decided on the sum.

Let me recommend to your notice this faience pitcher. I assure you it is rare. You can see for yourself that it is beautiful."

"If it is really of no value in itself," said Jacqueline, disregarding St. Hilary's pitcher, "there is nothing that appeals to me more than that steel box. Mr. St. Hilary's story has quite touched my imagination."

"It is already yours. And now what will madame choose?"

"Could I examine that decrepit old clock in the hidden room again? I happen to be making a collection of clocks."

"Then you can make no mistake about this superb specimen in Sienna marble," urged the dealer.

"But, like Jacqueline," smilingly protested Mrs. Gordon, "I prefer something that has a touch of mystery about it. And that old clock, shut up in the darkness there, one knows not how many years, ought to have a history."

"But it is so very, very old," cried old Luigi deprecatingly. "It has not gone for two hundred years."

"That hardly makes it less interesting," I said dryly. "Let us see the clock by all means." The reluctance of both St. Hilary and Luigi had struck me as being rather strange.

"Your Excellency surely does not mean to give it away? It is an heirloom of the family," expostulated old Luigi obstinately.

"I have told you to bring it out," commanded the duke.

Very reluctantly the old man entered the little chamber.

"It is too heavy," he cried from within. "I can not lift it."

Duke da Sestos and myself went to his assistance. Together we carried it to the sala and placed it on the center-table. The slight jar set a number of bells ringing in musical confusion.

Certainly it was unique—at least I had never seen anything like it.

Imagine an oblong box of bronze, about as long as one's arm, and three-quarters as high. Around three sides of this box ran a little platform, heavily gilded. Immediately above this platform were twelve doors, three at either end, and six at the face. It was almost bare of ornament, except that on the top had been three figures. The heads and arms of all three were now broken off.

"Its very simplicity and ugliness interest one," cried Mrs. Gordon with enthusiasm. "And those twelve doors certainly mean that it is an automaton, do they not, Mr. St. Hilary? One can imagine the stiff little figures that appear,

each at its hour, and at their respective doors—kings with their crowns of gold, ginger-bread Virgins, prelates with their miters, and armored knights. Each figure in its hour does its devoirs, I suppose, and disappears again."

"At every shake of the table," said Jacqueline, "its bells clang angrily. You might think it was offended at being disturbed after its long sleep of two hundred years."

"Yes," confessed the duke, looking at the clock thoughtfully, "it awakes a fantastic note that will strike in the fancy of the most dull. Think what stories of love and intrigue it has listened to! What deeds of revenge and hate it has looked down upon! At what hours of agony and ecstasy have those bells not chimed? What death-knells to hopes, what peals of love and happiness!"

Jacqueline had been turning the clock slowly around. Suddenly she sank on her knees to examine it more closely, and read aloud:

Se mi guardi con cura,
Se mi ascolti con attenzione,
E se, nell' intendermi, tu Sei cosi acorto
com' io lo sono nel dirti—
T' arridera la Fortuna.

"Will you translate it for me, please?"

"'If you guard me carefully, if you listen to me diligently, if you are as clever in understand-

ing me as I am in telling you, Fortune will smile on you,' " translated the duke.

" The delicious braggart! " cried Mrs. Gordon delightedly. " Now what do you think that brave promise means, Mr. St. Hilary? "

" Pooh, pooh, madame! It promises too much to mean anything. 'Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise.' 'Time is money'—there are a score of proverbs as vague and as meaningless."

" Oh, but you mustn't cast any aspersions on my dear clock. Perhaps Luigi can read the riddle more cleverly. Do you know if there is any legend connected with the clock? "

The old man hesitated.

" Come, come, speak up," said the duke roughly.

" Ah, yes, your Excellency," replied the old man. " But I implore you not to sell or give away the clock. You will always regret it. Good luck goes with the clock, your Excellency."

" But the motto," urged Mrs. Gordon. " Has it any meaning? "

" Yes, yes, signora. It means that each hour brings its own gift, if one can only understand. One may never suffer, not hunger nor cold, not poverty nor disappointment, if one can only read the secret of each hour. For at every hour some-

thing wonderful is told. And the clock is a charm against the Evil One. My father told me, and his father told him. Yes; we have guarded it carefully in that quiet room. It has stood there as long as I can remember. And now your Excellency will give it away! Misfortune will come; I know it."

"Be still, imbecile. Madame, shall I have the clock taken to my launch for you?"

"Oh, don't deprive the old man of his charm against the evil eye, aunt," said Jacqueline lightly, half pitying, half mocking the old servant's distress.

"I would remind Miss Quintard that it is I who am deprived of the charm, if there is any, and not Luigi," laughed the duke.

"I would be the last one to bring you ill fortune," jested Mrs. Gordon. Then very slowly, "But I intend to bring you good fortune, not to take it away from you."

"I am hoping precisely for that," said the duke gravely, and looked at Jacqueline.

Jacqueline was still kneeling before the clock.

"How I should like to know what you really mean, foolish legend," she said wistfully.

I leaned on the table and stooped toward her.

"If one were to run down that legend, it would require patience and perseverance enough to sat-

isfy even you, would it not, Jacqueline?" I asked lightly.

She smiled, but seeing that I was half in earnest, became serious.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I believe it would."

"Then, Jacqueline, when I begin my legends of Venice, shall I take up first the legend of this old clock?"

"Do," she said carelessly. "Aunt would thank you, I know."

I walked over to the window, and looked gloomily without. I had hoped Jacqueline was in earnest when she suggested that I should write a book on the legends of Venice. But now that I wished to take her desire seriously, she was evidently inclined to laugh at me.

"Will you clap your hands for the servant in my launch to come up?" asked the duke. "I wish him to carry the clock down for Mrs. Gordon."

"One moment, please," said St. Hilary. "I am collector enough to understand Mrs. Gordon's enthusiasm. But being a dealer as well as a collector, I cannot allow this enthusiasm to interfere with my pocket-book. I know, Mrs. Gordon, you would never forgive me if I did not say that my sneers at the value of the clock were the pre-

tense of the dealer who depreciates a thing that he may get it the cheaper. The clock, madame, is a valuable antique. The value of the things in this palace will be lowered considerably if it is not included in its contents."

There was an awkward pause. The duke reddened with anger.

"In that case," said Mrs. Gordon, greatly embarrassed, "I could not dream, of course——"

"Mr. St. Hilary," said the duke coldly, "the clock is not for sale to you at any price. Madame, you will not offend me by refusing?"

Mrs. Gordon gazed at her niece in perplexity.

"You would find it rather difficult to carry it about with you in Europe," said Jacqueline lamely.

"Yes, I am afraid I should," declared Mrs. Gordon with alacrity.

"If you will entrust the task to me, I shall be charmed to have it packed and sent to America for you," volunteered St. Hilary. He seemed eager to atone for his ill-timed remarks of a moment before.

"But Mr. Hume tells me he is going to write a book on the legends of Venice," interrupted Jacqueline. "A moment ago, aunt, he suggested that he might be able to discover one about this

very clock, and I encouraged him to try. Why not let Mr. Hume take care of it during our travels?"

I professed my willingness joyfully, and though it was evident that neither the duke nor St. Hilary welcomed Jacqueline's suggestion, the clock was soon placed in a gondola I summoned.

To its chimes the fortunes of da Sestos and myself were to dance merrily.

CHAPTER V

THE day following I was strangely depressed. I had run the gantlet of hope and doubt. Jacqueline's various moods had baffled me. And the duke—frankly, I feared him. Jacqueline had so obviously admired him. He stood for the very qualities that I lacked. The glamour of his name, the luxurious environment he scorned so vigorously, his verve, and, above all, his alliance with Mrs. Gordon, made him a formidable rival. For that Mrs. Gordon, in some subtle way, had already come to a vague understanding with him, I did not doubt.

Two letters were on the tray that brought in my morning coffee. One from Jacqueline; the other from her brother. They called to me in quite different directions. Jacqueline to her side; the brother to his assistance in Rome. The young fool was in trouble—trouble serious enough to demand the assistance of one who had influence with the authorities. I happened to fill that position. I must go to his aid.

In Jacqueline's letter I fancied I read a tenderness that was altogether new and delightful.

It was no longer the reserved Jacqueline that spoke. There was a delightful shyness, but through the shyness spoke the woman who dared to be bold for the man she loved.

She wished me to call at once. We would discuss the book together. And she had invited St. Hilary and myself to dinner that evening. After I had left them yesterday he had hinted at a wonderful story about the old clock. She would make him talk. I should have copy for one of my legends at least.

But I could not hesitate as to my destination. For, in assisting her brother, I would be doing Jacqueline a favor. Unfortunately, I could not tell her why I had to leave Venice so peremptorily. Neither she nor her aunt must know that the youngster had made an ass of himself. I wrote her merely that an affair of importance had called me to Rome. I caught the first train south.

Ten days passed before I sniffed once more the pungent odor of the lagoons. There had been complications and delays; and in his remorse the boy had had a touch of Roman fever. I could not leave him like that.

A letter from Jacqueline awaited me. It had arrived only a day or two before. Her annoyance at my sudden flight from Venice was obvious.

She regretted my absence at her dinner, but I had not missed much. St. Hilary had refused to talk. Perhaps there was really no legend, after all. And, indeed, when one came to think over the matter calmly, was it worth while attempting to discover one? And was I really interested in writing the book—that is, for its own sake? I ought to be well assured of that. She was afraid she would not see me again for the present. They were to leave almost immediately for Bellagio.

I walked over to my window. I was bitterly hurt and disappointed.

Venice was storm-swept. The Giudecca, deserted, was lashed by wind and rain. The ships, moored near the Salute, tossed and swayed at their anchors. The goddess over the customs-house spun about on her golden ball and vainly tried to shield herself behind her flimsy veil.

The brightness and glory of Venice had vanished as in a dream. The palaces, ivory and gold in the sunlight, looked sodden and decayed in the gloom, like an old woman deprived of her rouge-pot and powder. Venice, in short, was a painting, a masterpiece, if you wish, which the mischievous fist of some mawkish infant had smeared and smudged. The pigeons, the cafés, the gondolas —they are the creatures of the sun. To-day the pigeons were huddled under the Dome of the

Salute; the cafés deserted; the gondolas covered with tarpaulin.

But as I looked, a gondola, rowed by two oarsmen, emerged from the rain and fog. It was headed directly for the landing outside my windows. It touched the steps. The old *gransieri*, shivering in an archway, pattered across the quay with his hook. The passenger leaped ashore. It was St. Hilary. And in this weather!

I drew the portière. I walked over to the mantel and felt for a match to light the gas, for it was growing late. As I struck it, half a dozen visiting-cards caught my eye—eight, to be quite precise. One of the eight was that of the Duke da Sestos. What humble attraction had I for the noble gentleman? The seven others bore the name of St. Hilary. Seven calls in ten days! I looked at them thoughtfully. And then—why, I have no idea—I thought of the mysterious clock that Mrs. Gordon had entrusted to my care, and that I had left with a jeweler on the Piazza to see if it was quite beyond repair. It would be just as well to say nothing of that to the dealer. I was curious to know precisely the fascination that the old timepiece had for him.

"I was longing for some one to talk to. Just returned from a little trip to Rome. What's the news?"

"Oh, I have just dropped in for a smoke. Where's your whisky? I am drenched through. The felsa of that confounded gondola leaked."

I caught the swift glance that took in every detail of my room. I waved my hand to the sideboard.

"Help yourself. I'll join you presently, when I have slipped into a bath-robe. You'll find the cigarettes by the whisky."

I stepped into my room. I heard the fizz of the siphon. I caught the fumes of his cigarette. I heard the creak of a wicker-chair as he threw himself into it. Then there was silence. I was about to rejoin him, when I happened to look into my mirror. St. Hilary was reflected in it, and he was opening a coat-closet.

I whistled noisily, and put my eye to a crack in the door. He was looking into a cabinet. Then he pulled aside the portière that hid the deep recess of the window. Another puzzled glance about the room, and he sank noiselessly into the chair. It was not difficult to put two and two together. He was looking for Mrs. Gordon's clock. Well, he should satisfy himself thoroughly that it was not on my premises. Then I would wait for his next move. I entered my sitting-room, still whistling.

"Just a word to my man, and I'm ready for

our smoke," I said, and went into the sala. I banged the door after me, but took pains to leave it carefully ajar.

It was as I thought. He promptly slipped into my bedroom. I waited considerately for him to resume his seat before joining him.

"Well, indefatigable peerer and pryer for the rare and odd, what is the news of the past ten days?" I asked, reaching for the Scotch.

I knew he was watching me closely. The nouns were a trifle suggestive.

"No news so far as I know. I have been buried in the palazzo of the duke, making an inventory of things. Interesting old palace, eh?"

I nodded, and blew a cloud of cigarette-smoke into the air.

"Nice chap, the duke."

I nodded again.

"Extremely gallant to the ladies."

Again I nodded, but without much enthusiasm.

"Rather pretty compliment, his giving them those souvenirs."

"No one but an Italian would have thought of it."

"But I must say I was disgusted at the poor taste of the ladies."

"Why so?"

"My dear fellow, did you observe that bowl of

majolica? Or that superb cloisonné Kioto vase? With carved ivories galore and a plaque of della Robbia to choose from, and to pick out a silly timepiece."

"Ah, yes," I remarked dryly, "you had an eye on that clock yourself, hadn't you?"

"Tut, tut, I have an eye on everything that is useless and odd. By the way, she asked you to keep it for her. I should like to have a look at it. Trot it out, my boy."

I gazed into St. Hilary's innocent blue eyes, and laughed quietly. "The other day, in Rome," I said slowly, "I met on the street a certain Captain Villari. He's as poor as the proverbial mouse, and an acquaintance. He asked me to go to the opera with him. I did not refuse, though the invitation, coming from him, surprised me. And the inevitable happened, of course. At the very box-office, he discovered with cries of consternation that he had left all his money in his other uniform. Might he dare, would I think it too presuming, if he asked me for the loan of ten lire until to-morrow?

"I assured him with all the warmth in the world that it would be a privilege. I put my hand in my pocket to oblige him. *Accidenti!* Was there ever such devilish luck! I had left my money in my morning clothes!

"We looked at each other half a minute; then we embraced with laughter. It was such an odd coincidence. And so we went our separate ways, quite good-naturedly. He knew I was lying. I knew he had been lying. What do you think of my story?"

"What has that story to do with an old timepiece?" he blustered.

I leaned forward and tapped him on the knee.

"Only this, my crafty dealer in antiquities. You, as well as my captain, are too crafty by half. You know the timepiece is not in these rooms, just as well as I do myself."

"I don't understand you," he fumed.

"No? Then what were you looking for a minute or two ago? In that cabinet, behind the portière there? By Jove, you had the impertinence to lift the cover of my trunk in the bedroom."

If I had expected him to show shame or confusion, I was much mistaken. He stared at me a moment. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"It wasn't nice of me, I confess," he said coolly. "I should have acted with my customary frankness, and have asked to see it first."

"I think it would have been the better way. As to this customary frankness of yours, you

guard that virtue so closely that I am a stranger to it."

"Very well, I'll give you an instance of it. Now that my cards are on the table, what have you done with the clock?"

"Is that what you call being frank? I fail to see those cards of yours on the table even now. Play fair, St. Hilary."

"I don't understand you," he said, and his neck took on a purple tinge.

"You understand me perfectly. Just as my captain did. And I have both eyes and ears. Let me remind you, in the first place, you were perfectly well aware that the clock was in the palace. You looked for it deliberately, but slyly. When I was curious in my turn, you were hardly pleased. You pooh-poohed the chamber. You made fun of the clock. You blew out the candle promptly that no one might examine it. When Mrs. Gordon insisted on doing so, you vainly attempted to divert her interest. As a last resort, you tried to make it impossible for her to accept it by asserting that it was an antique of great value. Don't you think that was in extremely bad taste?"

"My dear fellow, desperate cases require desperate remedies."

"Ah, then you confess that you were even des-

perately anxious to have the clock? Why should you deny it? There is nothing to be ashamed of. Your eight calls have made me quite certain of that, and the fact that you played the spy, looking into my trunk just now."

St. Hilary laughed, a little too boisterously.

"Good, good!" he cried. "I confess I didn't credit my dear dilettante with quite so observing an eye. And if I were to confess that this old clock interests me beyond belief, why should you not satisfy my curiosity? Have you any interest in it? An interest that conflicts with mine, for instance?" and he looked at me curiously.

"It is quite possible," I answered calmly.

"And this interest really conflicts with mine?"

"Why not?" I answered, smiling at him.

"Then I see no reason why I should not go my way and you yours." He picked up his hat in high dudgeon and walked toward the door.

"Nor do I," I answered, reaching for a cigar. "However, let me remind you that I still have the clock."

It may seem strange and unreasonable that I should have assumed so cautious a tone with the dealer. My interest in the clock was simply that I wished to write up the legend connected with it, if legend there was. But I browbeat him

to punish him. He had not come to me frankly and openly. He had spied on me and he had lied to me. The penalty for that must be a full confession as to why he attached such tremendous importance to this clock.

He stood at the door. His eyes devoured my face with that same searching glance that had so startled me on the Piazza a few days before.

"Trust me, St. Hilary," I said very quietly. "I am not a man to betray a confidence—certainly not the confidence of a friend like you. And it is barely possible I may help you."

"I have thought that, too," he said, and hesitated.

"Then why not?"

"Because you are too much of the dilettante, the dreamer," he said angrily. "Bah, I need a man like the Duke da Sestos—a man that has grit and resource—who can even be unscrupulous on occasion—yes, look into a friend's trunk and not feel too squeamish. I do need help; but could you go to extreme ends with me patiently and relentlessly? You hardly fill the bill, Hume."

He had quoted almost Jacqueline's words. He could have said nothing that would have touched me so deeply. I answered him impetuously:

"St. Hilary, do you forget that it was you who made me a dreamer? It is you who first preached to me impossible ideals of beauty and art. And when I failed to reach those ideals, you laughed at me; you consoled me with sneers. If I had not a soul to appreciate art and beauty, there was still the sensuous Venice for me to enjoy. And so, month by month, I have sunk into the slough of materialism, until, at last, it is almost too late for me to shake myself free. First, the woman I love flaunts at the dilettante, and then it is my friend."

He stared at me; then, rising, he walked over to where I sat and put his hand on my shoulder.

"What do you mean—that the woman you love has flaunted you?"

I told him quite simply. He passed his hand across his forehead.

"My dear, dear Hume," he said affectionately, "forgive me. Love is a thing dead and past for me. I am in the sere leaf and brown. I had forgotten that love might come into your life. So your interest in the clock, after all, is simply that you wish to write a legend about it?"

"Yes."

"Listen to me. Hume. I have a quest that demands patience, courage, faith, a will that is

relentless. If I shared it with you, could you bring to it these qualities?"

"Try me," I said firmly. "If it is a task that demands action, and if it concerns this clock, I am with you heart and soul."

"It does concern the clock. But it is a hundred-to-one shot, with the odds all against us. If you fail, at least you will have your legend. If you succeed, you will share equally with myself. I have needed one for this quest in whose honesty I could have absolute faith. I have thought of you, but only to mistrust you. If I trust you now, will you follow where I shall lead?"

"Try me," I said again.

CHAPTER VI

He unbuttoned his frock-coat (I had never seen him wear any garment less formal) and took out of it a slender little volume in vellum covers. He passed it to me in silence. I opened it. It was a manuscript copy, roughly stitched together. I recognized the handwriting as that of St. Hilary.

"Well?" I asked curiously, returning it to him.

"This is a crude translation of certain passages in the Diary of Marius Sanudo, a Venetian who lived about the beginning of the sixteenth century. I made this translation in the Royal Library at Vienna the other day. The Diary is one of the rarest books in the world. You are wide enough awake to listen to it for an hour or two?"

"It concerns the clock?"

"It concerns the casket and the clock. You may imagine these extracts as being divided into two chapters. Chapter I—concerning the jewels and the casket; Chapter II—the clock. My remarks may be supposed to constitute a third

chapter. You have heard of Beatrice d'Este, the Duchess of Milan and wife of Ludovico the Moor?"

"Practically only what you have told me about her. I know she lived during the latter part of the fifteenth century."

"Then I suppose you have never seen her portrait, attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. It hangs in the Ambrosiana Library at Milan, the second room to the left as you enter; and I assure you that it is well worth a little pilgrimage to Milan to see. It is a profile of extraordinary charm—a young girl of eighteen. It is difficult to imagine this adorable child—for she was only twenty-two when she died—as an ambassadress to the most powerful court in Europe.

"Her husband, Ludovico, toward the last part of his reign, was hard pressed by his foes. After intrigues with two kings and a pope, he found himself caught in the web of his own treachery. He needed money to pay his allies. But his wonderful Sala del Tesoro, with its oak chest of gold and plate, was empty. Only the jewels were left. I have already told you that this collection has never since been equaled in artistic value.

"Now, if you are familiar with the financial methods of these princes of the Renaissance, you will know that in times of stress they resorted to

the rather vulgar expedient of simply putting their jewels in pawn.

"Beatrice had conducted these delicate little transactions at Venice for her husband more than once. But now, before she had recourse to this last desperate expedient, she was to plead before the Signory, as his ambassadress, for help both of money and men. If the Signory refused to help Ludovico, her husband, she was to appeal to the Doge; for the old man had already shown the utmost regard for this high-spirited young duchess. If, however, both Doge and Signory failed her, she was to pawn the jewels with Albani, the richest goldsmith in Venice.

"With this introduction, I will read you the first extract from the Diary of Messer Sanudo:

"'Of all the cities of the world, Venice is the one where the greatest honor is paid to strangers. But never was lord or lady received with greater joy by the Signory in council. The Doge himself conducted her to the seat of honor, and all eyes were turned to her in admiration at her divine beauty. She wore a gold brocade embroidered with crimson doves, with a jeweled feather in her cap, and a rope of pearls and diamonds around her neck, to which the priceless ruby, the most glorious stone, I think, man has ever seen, called El Spigo, is fastened as pendant.

"'All were amazed at the words of wisdom and eloquence that fell from her childish lips. She set forth her love for Venice, and piteously implored our help against Milan's foes. If it were not possible for us to furnish men, at least let her not return quite empty of hand to her dear lord; for she would rather die than cause him such grief and despair.

"'The Signory and Doge listened to her courteously. When she had ended, the Doge rose and thanked her graciously for the words she had spoken. He declared that nothing would give the Signory greater joy than to do all she had asked. But he reminded her that at this time Venice was herself at war with Genoa, her hereditary foe. Her own treasury was empty. There was hardly to be found in all Venice a noble or plebeian who had not loaned to the state money out of his private fortune. When he had said this, he descended from his dais again, and gently taking her by the hand, so led her without, the Signory being moved to admiration at her dignity and grace.'"

"And of course they denied her petition, since they were Venetians?"

"That goes without saying. Have I not said that the jewels remain in Venice to this day? At least the more glorious part of them."

"I am impatient to hear of them."

St. Hilary again read from the Diary of Sanudo:.

"'This day the duchess went in state to see the treasure of San Marco. As the bucentaur, containing the Doge and one hundred and fifty of her company, entered the Canale Grande, the duchess confessed that never before had she beheld the like. From the windows and the balconies, hung with the richest tapestries, noble ladies, glittering with gold chains and gems, looked down on the sumptuous scene. It was the finest sight of the whole world. And when they landed at the Molo, they could hardly force their way through the press, though the Doge himself walked in front of them. Every one turned to look at the magnificent jewels on the duchess. On every side I heard, "This is the wife of Signor Ludovico. Look what fine jewels she wears! What splendid diamonds and rubies!" And indeed every part of her vest whereon was embroidered the two towers of the port of Genoa was covered with them.

"'And when they came out of the treasure-house, I myself heard the Doge say, "It is but a poor sight for you, dear lady, seeing that the jewels which adorn you are as many and beautiful as those we guard so carefully." (Words

that had better have been left unsaid, for such light words bring into discredit the glories of our Venice.)

"'The duchess answered boastingly (and who indeed could blame her, seeing that the Doge should not have said what he did?), "Do these poor stones please your Excellency? To-morrow I shall show you some gems that are indeed wonderful."

"'And the Doge said sorrowfully, "I shall await to-morrow with the greatest eagerness in the world."'"

St. Hilary laid the book face downward on his knees.

"Now, it is a matter of record, Hume, that she did show the stones to the Doge. Whether he fell under the glamour of their beauty, or the charm and witchery of the lovely ambassadress, does not concern us. What does concern us is the fact that the jewels were not locked up in the strong-box of Albani the Jew, but of the Doge."

"And the gems were never redeemed?" I interrupted.

"Never. Beatrice returned from her mission only to die a few months later. Ludovico was taken captive by Louis of France, who dragged him to Lyons, where, like a wild beast, he perished miserably in an iron cage.

"The next extract that I shall read from the Diary of Sanudo is two years later. During these two years his pages are full of the troubles Venice was caused by her enemy Genoa, and the straits to which she was put to raise funds. Every citizen, we read, contributed his dole, however humble. Except the Doge. Sanudo refers again and again to the increasing distrust at this strange negligence on the part of the chief officer of the state. But we know that his fortune was completely tied up in the jewels."

"But why did he not pawn the jewels?" I interrupted. "He must have known that Beatrice was dead. They could never be redeemed."

"Ah, that's a pertinent question. Let our Diarist answer it for you. This answer, I assure you, will be of interest:

"'This day, the fourteenth of November, in the year of our blessed Lord fourteen hundred and ninety-nine, I have heard that which is more incredible than the travels of Messer Marco Polo to the great Mogul of Tartary. Scarce an hour has passed that I was told it by one of the Signory himself; and I hasten to write it down, lest any of its wonders escape me.

"'All Venice knows that though our Doge is the richest in the state, yet he alone hath con-

tributed to the treasury no proportion of the greatness of his fortune. So that to-day, when one after another in the Signory bemoaned the lack of money, and the Doge sat silent and neither made excuse nor offered aid, murmurs of discontent and suspicion arose louder than any that have yet been heard. At first the Doge smiled bravely and affected to listen as heretofore. But there were those who saw him tremble for very fear. And presently, one bolder than the rest, charged the Doge to his face with treachery, in thus hiding his wealth in the time of the state's direst need. Still the Doge kept silence, until murmurs and shouts arose on all sides. Then he arose, half dead for fear, and declared that he would explain all. And this is the manner of his speaking:

"'"My lords of the Signory, I beseech you to have patience and listen to me; for that I am indeed the most unfortunate of men you will see when I have done speaking. The whole of my wealth did I loan to Ludovico the Moor, at the entreaty of his wife, when last she visited this state two years ago. She promised that she would redeem the gems before a year was passed. But you, lords, know how she hath died and her husband Ludovico lies imprisoned.

"'"My lords, I had for the duchess the ten-

derness of a father for a beloved daughter, and thinking that I would give her pleasure, when she should come again to redeem her jewels, I hired Giovanni da Sestos, the goldsmith, whose renown as an artist you all know, to make a casket for the gems that should be as beautiful as the very gems themselves.

" ' " It was to be so small that it could be carried about. Yet it was to be so strong that the most skilful thief would be baffled to break it open. For when it was once closed, certain springs ingeniously contrived by clockwork made it impossible even for the man who possessed the casket to open it till a day of twelve hours should have passed.

" ' " I had made promise to Messer Giovanni that he should receive three payments for his task. Two payments I made to him; one, when he undertook the work; another, that he might buy the gems with which the cover was to be richly adorned. The third payment I promised to make when the casket should be given into my hands.

" ' " But hardly had Giovanni finished his task when Beatrice died. And, my lords of the Signory, knowing now that the jewels could never be redeemed, seeing that Ludovico is in prison and his wife dead, I vowed that I would now

pawn them to Albani the Jew, that I might at last help the state in her need.

"'"But when Giovanni wrote to me to say that the casket, which he had at last completed, was more beautiful than anything like it since the beginning of the world, I longed greatly to see the jewels in the glorious box before they should be out of my possession forever. And now see how the heavy hand of God hath punished me for my weakness.

"'"For I had written to Giovanni to bring to me the casket alone and at night. (For I did not wish that any should know that I possessed the gems till I had pawned them and until the money should be paid into the treasury of the state.) I bade him come at the hour of twelve to my bed-chamber. I told him I should receive him alone. I would let him in by a secret stairway.

"'"And so, when all Venice slept, I admitted him to my room, where there was none other than myself, except the guard.

"'"My lords of the Signory, never did I dream of anything so rare and beautiful as that casket. It seemed to me that I should die for very desire of it. And at last I thought of a cunning plan. Giovanni himself fell guilelessly in with this plan. For he was eager to see

whether the gems would fit the little pockets that he had made for each of the more costly. And so we placed the gems in the pocket of the casket, and then, as if by chance, I closed the cover, which could not be opened for a whole day of twelve hours. And now, I thought, Giovanni must leave both casket and gems; for I had intended to put him off with smooth promises, saying that it was late, and that on the morrow he should have his third payment of money.

"'"But Giovanni clasped the casket in both his hands and swore he would not leave it with me until I should have paid him every ducat I owed him. But the man's anger was without reason, for he knew I could not pay him the money that he asked until I had first pawned the jewels. And presently, when I attempted to soothe him, he became as violent as a wild beast. (And indeed the goldsmith da Sestos, though a great artist, was always, I verily believe, half mad.) The guard at last became afraid for my life. For Giovanni swore that I had entrapped him, and obstinately refused to leave the palace until I should have paid him all.

"'"Seeing now that nothing would move him to reason, I made pretense that I could fetch from the treasury the money he demanded; and leaving the guard in my bed-chamber to keep watch

on the treasure, I left my room. But I was careful to draw the bolts after me, so that it was impossible that he should escape with the casket.

"'"And indeed it was my purpose to call the soldiers of the guard who kept watch at the foot of the secret stairway, so that the insolent fellow might be thrust without the palace, for he had angered me greatly. I was without the chamber but a few moments, but when I returned with the guard and the doors were unbolted, a scene of horror met my eyes.

"'"The guard lay dead with a dagger in his breast. Giovanni writhed on the floor in an agony of pain, grievously wounded, though not unto death. And the casket was gone.

"'"My lords of the Signory, you will ask how the casket was gone, seeing that the door had been locked and the two men were both in my bed-chamber. But the window, looking out on the court of the Ducal Palace, was open. From the balcony hung a rope strong enough to bear the weight of a man.

"'"It was many days before Giovanni came to his senses. Then he told how two men had been hid in the balcony. No sooner had I gone from the chamber than they had set on him and the guard. He accused me of hiding the men in the balcony. (I much wonder that I did not

think of it. But, to my cost, I did not, and it is a man deprived of wealth and honor that speaks to you this day.)"

"'The Signory heard the confession of the Doge for the most part in silence (though some there were that jeered). When he had finished, he who had first accused the Doge of treachery demanded what proof the senate might have of this fable, seeing that no doubt the Doge had caused the death of Giovanni. (And, indeed, it had been a great mystery, his disappearance.)

"'At that the Doge made a sign, and one fetched Giovanni from the leads where he had been languishing since the stealing of the gems. But Giovanni protested with tears that far from being guilty himself, it was the Doge who had caused the gems to be taken, and nothing could shake him from this belief. So that at last there were many of the Signory who inclined to it. And presently, when they had questioned him closely, they decreed, partly because certain ones believed him innocent of all evil-doing, and partly because he was so incomparable an artist, that he should no longer be held a prisoner under the *piombi* of the Ducal Palace, but should return to his own house. But lest by any chance he had been guilty of the loss of the gems, he was there to be held a prisoner; and guards were

appointed to have charge over him day and night.

"'This is the truly miraculous story of the jewels of the Doge; but few in Venice believe it. For what goldsmith could not be bribed to swear to such a story? And as for the Doge, it would seem that the state could find one better fitted to wear the cap and ermine robe.'"

"And that is chapter one?" I asked, taking a long breath.

"That is chapter one," echoed St. Hilary.

CHAPTER VII

"SHALL we now proceed to chapter two?" he asked presently. "May I assume that I have awakened your interest?"

"You may certainly assume that." I smiled at his smug assurance.

"The next extract, then, from our Diarist is two years later, December, 1501, to be precise. In the meanwhile, it seems the Doge had regained the confidence of the republic. At any rate he had evidently not been removed from office.

"'This day was erected a tablet in the Frari to Giovanni da Sestos, who died some six weeks since. He was an incomparable artist in gold and precious stones, the greatest that Venice has known, but famous even beyond his just merits as an artist by reason of the mystery of the wonderful casket and the more wonderful gems. And people are saying (though I myself have not seen it) that he hath left a clock that is a greater marvel than the lost casket itself, which only the jeweler and his son (beside the Doge) set eyes on before it was stolen. And certain

ones who have seen this clock (before it was broken) declare that the clock of our Piazza, though infinitely larger, is but a puerile thing compared to it.

"'When first imprisoned in his own house, Giovanni utterly despaired, for he was watched by spies day and night, and none might converse with him without their being present. For days he did not move, but sat moody and sullen, gazing at nothing with his terrible, burning eyes.

"'So he lived for many weeks. Then one day he leaped to his feet and shouted aloud for his tools. Though his adored casket had been stolen from him, he swore he would make something more marvelous than that before death came on him. And because he was so great an artist, not even the Doge dared to deprive Venice of any wonder that he might make, though he had sworn that Giovanni should never again breathe the fresh air of the Piazza. So they gave to him his tools, and for certain hours during the day his son was permitted to aid him, since he suffered no other to enter his workshop. Two years the father and son labored at this clock until it was quite finished.

"'And when it was finished, Giovanni sent his son to that Doge who had caused him to make the casket and had since imprisoned him, be-

seeching him to come to him with all haste, for he had somewhat to say to him, and to show him. The Doge went straightway to his house. For he thought he was to hear some confession as to the missing casket, since he believed steadfastly that it was the goldsmith who had caused it to be stolen, and no other.

"'Giovanni met him with all ceremony, and, taking him courteously by the hand, led him to his workshop, where stood the wonderful clock.

"'When the Doge saw this clock he was filled with anger, for the three bronze figures reclining about the face of the clock were hideous images of Giovanni's most bitter foes. Two of them were a rival goldsmith and the jailer who had fed him when he was a prisoner in the *piombi*. But the third and most hideous of all was the Doge himself, such a miracle of ugliness and horror that to look on it would make a man shudder. But because he wished to hear what Giovanni had to say, the Doge spoke Giovanni fair, and declared himself delighted with his ingenuity. For they say (though, as I have written before, neither have I seen the clock nor have I known any that have) that at every hour a door opened, and some story out of the history of Venice was acted.

"'And as each hour went by the Doge became

wearied of watching the antics of the clock as the hours struck. But Giovanni compelled him to be patient and besought him to see the antics of the figures of all of the twelve hours. Between each hour the Doge kept inquiring of the goldsmith if he had anything to tell him. And each time that the question was asked the goldsmith laughed boisterously, and said, "Though I did tell thee, thou hast not ears to hear." This answer he made several times, till at last the Doge, seeing at last that he was being ridiculed, arose in anger and cried: "For the last time, Messer Giovanni, hast thou anything to say to me?" And still the goldsmith answered with jeers, "Though I told thee, thou hast not ears to hear," and would say no more.

"'Then, because he had been answered in this rude fashion many times, the Doge could no longer restrain his passion. He lifted his staff, and furiously smote off the three figures of the clock, and in doing so the clock fell violently to the earth, and it was broken in its insides, and never more will it strike hour, so at least I am told.

"'When Giovanni saw that his marvelous clock was broken, he raved like a madman, and spat on the Doge, and belabored him with his fists so that he was compelled to take flight from

the house. And as he fled, the goldsmith called after him very bitterly: "Did I not say thou wert a fool? For, though the casket were lost, did I not make a greater marvel? But thou canst not understand its divine beauty and wonder. And now, by my oath, though I knew the secret place of the casket, yet shouldst thou never know, seeing that thou hast broken my clock."

"'As soon as the Doge reached the Ducal Palace, he bade the captain of the inquisitorial guard fetch Giovanni. He determined that he would once more put him to extremest tortures, for he remembered the words: "And now, by my oath, though I knew the secret place of the casket, yet shouldst thou never know." But when they reached the house of Giovanni they found both his son and himself lying dead, side by side, and by the look of their faces they saw that they had taken poison. And now the mystery of the casket will never be known. As for the clock, it is said that it had an evil spirit, and no man cares whether the Inquisition hath destroyed it or hidden it.'"

St. Hilary closed the slim little book and gently laid it on the table. During the latter part of his recital I had risen from my seat and was walking about the room. Now I sat at the table opposite him, my hands stretched out limply be-

fore me. I stared at him as the Guest must have stared at the Ancient Mariner. For the Mariner's story was of things that were past and done with. St. Hilary's story was of things to come.

When I spoke, it was almost in a whisper, as if I were saying something too extravagant to be spoken out loud.

"Then you believe, St. Hilary, that the clock holds the secret? You believe that if you could discover the secret you would have a clue to the D'Este jewels? I see. Da Sestos was the thief, and when he saw that he was never to feast his eyes on the glorious fruit of his rascality, when he knew he was being watched night and day, he sank into the apathy of despair, until—until——"

I raised both my arms and stretched them out as if I were groping for something.

"Until?" repeated St. Hilary mockingly.

"Before heaven, St. Hilary," I cried, laughing loudly, "are you and I the two maddest men in Venice this evening?"

"On the contrary," he answered carelessly, flicking the ash of his cigarette daintily, "I begin to think I have made no mistake in choosing you for my companion. But the facts first. You are ready for chapter three?"

"Your own theories about this extraordinary mystery? Yes, yes."

The little man threw himself back in my armchair, a smirk of satisfaction on his wizened face. There was something of the actor about St. Hilary; he loved an appreciative audience, and he was determined to make the most of the present one.

CHAPTER VIII

"Did you see the London Times of—let me see—I believe it was the day before yesterday?" asked St. Hilary presently.

I shook my head. The question was apparently quite irrelevant, but I was accustomed to his sudden and startling changes of front in the discussion of any question.

"There was a remarkable robbery mentioned in that issue. A Bond Street jeweler appealed to his creditors for an extension of time in which to pay his debts. When he was denied that, he warned them that he should on a certain day go into bankruptcy. The night before he was to declare himself a bankrupt, however, when he was in his shop very late at night, puzzling out his accounts, he was attacked by thieves, and after being bound and gagged, his safe was blown open and rifled."

"A very ordinary robbery," I commented.

"Yes. But the thief was his confidential clerk."

"Who else should know so well the combination of the safe?" I asked indifferently.

"If you would only be a little more patient, Hume, you would not esteem my words so lightly. There is generally some intention behind them. As I was saying, he was robbed by his own clerk, but the extraordinary feature of the case is that the confidential clerk robbed the master with the master's consent and at his instigation. Substitute the son for the clerk, and you have a case of history repeating itself."

"Then the Doge was right. Da Sestos was the thief?"

"Consider for a moment the character of this Messer Giovanni. He is an artist, but an artist eccentric to the verge of madness. Sanudo again and again refers to it. Granting, then, that he is mad, in what form will this madness manifest itself? Essentially in the very traits and qualities that make up the artistic temperament. These traits will be developed abnormally. They will be pushed just over the narrow borderland. How would you define the artistic temperament, Hume?"

"Answering at random, I suppose the distinguishing traits of Giovanni's mind would be love for his work, irrespective of reward or gain, pride in it, patient thought, boldness in conceiving the idea, and skill in the working out of detail."

"Excellent. These are the traits of the sane artist. Now develop them, exaggerate them, make them abnormal. To take our goldsmith:

"For nearly two years he had been working on this casket. It is a masterpiece. It is his *chef d'œuvre*. He has never made anything quite so wonderful. Any artist is reluctant to give up his handiwork. But Giovanni has not merely the egotism of the artist; his is the egotism of the madman. He can not bear the thought of giving up the casket. He longs to keep it for himself. He at last decides to do so. But without the jewels it is but a meaningless thing. It is a mere box. With them, it is one of the wonders of the world. This longing for the stones becomes at last insupportable. He must have them for himself, and at any cost. For, remember, he is not a common thief. If the jewels were simply precious jewels, however priceless, they might not have tempted him. But a ring of Cellini's, a cameo of Domenico's, a carved gem of Caradossa, they tortured him, they tempted him, as they tempt me, as they torture me."

"And when once he has determined to possess these jewels, his cunning, his capacity for detail, his patience, all the qualities of the artist, serve

him now as the thief—is that the idea?" I interrupted.

St. Hilary nodded affirmatively and continued:

"The Doge unconsciously furthers his plans by his intense fear lest the fact that he possesses the jewels be made known. Only da Sestos, his son, and the Doge, indeed, knew the gems were in Venice. He has been told the very room in which the Doge is to receive from him the wonderful casket. He has thoroughly reconnoitered the ground. He knows that this bed-chamber of the Doge looks out on a court, which, in the dead of night, will surely be quite deserted. And so, with a coil of rope about his waist and a dagger beneath his blouse, he keeps the appointment.

"The guard, no doubt, was an unpleasant surprise. He did not count on him. But, after all, he has the advantage, for the guard has no suspicion of treachery.

"And so, in due time, he picks his quarrel. He has planned that carefully long ago. The Doge had written him that he can not make the last payment until he has disposed of some of the gems. Da Sestos had professed himself quite willing to wait.

"But now, when once the jewels are in the box, when once the cover is closed and it can not

be opened for twelve hours, he quite unexpectedly demands this last payment.

"The Doge indignantly reminds him that he had confessed himself willing to wait indefinitely. But he is obstinate. He refuses to leave the Ducal Palace without his just wage. If that is not forthcoming, he takes the casket with him. The Doge at last (as da Sestos has foreseen) is compelled to leave the room, under the pretense of getting the money. But, as he himself confessed to the Signory, it is really to summon the guard.

"Hardly has the cautious Doge drawn the bolts after him, before the dagger of the mad goldsmith has done its dread work. The rope is uncurled in the twinkling of an eye. It is lowered over the balcony, and to it is attached the casket and its precious contents. Below waits the confederate."

"And this confederate?" I asked breathlessly.

"Again the dagger is lifted," continued St. Hilary, ignoring my question. "This time it is against himself. It is worth a little pain, this glorious plunder.

"And so his plan succeeds. The jewels are his. After a few short weeks he will enjoy the reward of his cunning.

"But, unfortunately, suspicion is aroused in

the Doge's breast. For the old man, as we know, was not so guileless a fool as the jeweler thought him. Thief or no thief, da Sestos is imprisoned —at first in a dungeon, with tortures, then in his own house. He could stand the tortures. He could endure the awful heat and thirst under the leads of the Ducal Palace. But slowly came the knowledge, the certainty, that he was imprisoned, not for a month, a year, but for a lifetime. The vengeance of the Doge was implacable.

"Then if he must perish, was the secret of the casket to be sealed on his lips forever? The egotism of the madman made that thought intolerable. Then must he confess? Is his enemy to triumph at last? That thought was equally impossible. But, before he dies, he will indeed tell where the casket is hidden. Even after his death the secret shall be told. It shall be told daily, hourly; but so cunningly that though all the world listen, it shall not understand."

"But the confederate?" I interrupted again.

"It was his son, of course. He knew. He had helped to make the casket. He had helped to purloin it, and he it was who had hidden it. But not even to his faithful son would the mad jeweler leave the jewels. His cunning plan had become infinitely dear to him; and because this son knew, he must be sacrificed. So that after

he had worked side by side with his father on the clock, and had returned from his last errand in summoning the Doge, it was only to meet death at last. For we can not doubt that the father poisoned his son as well as himself. And so the hiding-place of the casket and the jewels is hidden in the clock for no man to guess unless he be such a man as da Sestos—one who has something of the very madness of desire and cunning that possessed the goldsmith."

"Unless—unless that son played the father false! There, there is the doubt on which your ingenious fabric totters!" I cried. I felt myself grow pale at the thought.

"You fool," he answered violently, "do you think I have not thought of that? But one never has a certainty in this world. One must take something on trust. And, by heaven, I am staking all on that son's loyalty to his mad father."

He sat in my armchair, huddled up, his face very pale and haggard in the dim candle-light. But his eyes were burning like those of the jeweler Giovanni. Then he roused himself and began to walk slowly about the room. At last, in the most commonplace tone in the world, he asked:

"Do you know anything of automaton clocks?"

"Nothing, except that they do extraordinary things."

"Things most extraordinary. You have never heard perhaps of the clock made by Le Denz?"

I shook my head.

"Really? That was a *chef d'œuvre* of the bizarre and wonderful. An automaton child wrote everything that was dictated to it—everything."

"Impossible!"

"I am telling you facts, my dear fellow, that you may verify for yourself in any cyclopedia. Then there was a man called Vancouver, who amused himself making a clock whose figures at certain hours played on the *tambour de flacque* —droll, very droll, that."

"An affair like that I saw once at Maskelyne's, I suppose," I said with assumed indifference. "I remember it was an automaton figure called Psyche, a whist-player. I played a game with her myself one dull afternoon."

"Tut, tut," exclaimed St. Hilary irritably, "I am not speaking of the tricks of the music-halls. There's the chess-player, for that matter, but all the world knows that a human being is concealed inside of those clumsy toys. I am speaking of veritable automatons, such as the clock you are to show me presently. Then there was a crazy

genius who made an automaton that would lull him to sleep with an air as gentle as spring zephyrs, and awaken him with a crashing march. There are automatons that sing and dance and talk without number. And one clock-maker wrote a book of instructions for keeping the mechanism of his clock in order after his death."

"All this, I take it," I said, lighting my cigar, which had repeatedly gone out, "is apropos of our clock. At every hour, as old Luigi said, it tells its secret."

"That is it," replied St. Hilary. "And when you and I, Hume, shall have mastered those twelve secrets, we shall know where our jewels are hidden. And now, have you still curiosity to know whether this is a legend or a fact?"

"Yes."

"Then you will help me to look for it?"

"Yes."

"Good. We may fail." He looked at me keenly.

"Of course."

"I like your monosyllables. I believe you are really in earnest."

"Yes; I am in earnest."

"Good again. Then we pool our interests. If we are successful, we share alike. Is that fair?"

"It is more than fair."

"That's settled then. And now let us have a look at your clock."

"Marruchi, the clock-maker on the Piazza, has it. I left it with him to see if it could be repaired."

He settled himself in the armchair, and pulled a rug over his knees.

"Marruchi, my boy, will be able to do nothing with it. It is a job above his caliber. And now to sleep, to sleep. You and I have a long journey ahead of us to-morrow."

"A journey? Where?"

"I shall be off to Amsterdam; you, to St. Petersburg. Good night."

"St. Petersburg?" I demanded stormily. "St. Petersburg! Why the devil St. Petersburg?"

But St. Hilary was already asleep—or pretended to be.

CHAPTER IX

The sun was just tipping the dome of the Salute as I fell asleep in my chair. My compact with St. Hilary promised great things. It meant action—a fascinating clue to follow, whether it led us to the jewels of the Doge or not. And if this dry chronicle of the past should prove to be no colorless legend, but a living fact, palpitating with human interest, I should have material for a book indeed. A legend of the Renaissance reincarnated in the twentieth century—that must appeal to Jacqueline no less than to me. Besides, the solving of this mystery, if solution there were, or the proving it to be but an empty fable, would certainly demand those qualities she believed I lacked so sadly. In everything this quest must be to my advantage.

It was eight o'clock before I could get St. Hilary into a gondola. As we were rowed rapidly to the Molo, an indescribable elation of spirits buoyed me up. Three years had slipped from my shoulders—three years of inertia and weariness. I was happy, and I did not play the fool and analyze too deeply my happiness.

Perhaps the warm, delicious breeze that came in puffs, laden with the scent of oleanders and roses from the royal gardens, had its influence; and the deep-blue sky, with the pearly clouds drifting slowly over San Giorgios, and the glorious sun, flashing on every tip and spire, and reflected silver-gray and rose-colored in the millions of little waves that danced and sparkled in a very ecstasy of color. For the rain had ceased. The sullen clouds were gone; the muddy streams; the discolored damp stones. Venice was again the enchanted city of fairy architecture, floating in the intangible air.

One would have thought it difficult to believe this wonderful story in the full light of day, on the Piazza here, flooded with sun, with the gondoliers smoking and breaking out into snatches of song, with the tourists already astir, and the guides from San Marco's already on the alert for them. Last night in my chambers, with the curtains drawn and the lights of Venice shining mystically in the distance, there might have been an excuse for one's imagination getting a little the better of one. But with the morning should have come sober skepticism. I can only say that there were two reasons that forbade that: one that I wished to believe; the other, that St. Hilary did believe.

A dozen steps on the Piazzetta, and we saw that Marruchi was not yet opened, so we strolled toward Florian's for our morning coffee. As we passed under the Arcade, St. Hilary paused at a bookseller's shop beneath the Libreria Vecchia. I noticed carelessly in passing that the window was filled with copies of a book just published.

"Have you looked into that book yet?" asked St. Hilary, as he bowed to the bookseller within.

"No," I answered, taking my seat at one of the round tables. "I did not even read its title."

"It is called Annali dell' Inquisizione in Venezia. It was published about a month ago. Organia and Rosen have had it in their windows for a fortnight at least."

"I have no doubt that that fact has some pertinency," I said irritably. "But before you explain just in what way, suppose you answer a few questions that naturally occurred to me while you were asleep in my chair last night."

"Well?"

"Why the deuce do you want me to go to St. Petersburg? Why do you intend going to Amsterdam? How did you come to know about the Diary of Sanudo? How did you guess that the clock was in the da Sestos palace? Or did you not guess? Surely we are not the first to attempt

to solve the secret of the hours? And even if no one has yet attempted it (and that seems incredible), is it not possible that the clock may be beyond repair, so that we can not fathom the significance of the automata, if there be any significance? And, lastly, how do you know that you have *the* clock?"

"If you had read that book in the shop there, some of your questions might have been answered," retorted St. Hilary placidly.

I held the coffee-pot suspended in mid-air. "It mentions the clock?"

"It does."

"Then it's there for all the world to read—the duke, for instance!"

The thought was rather startling.

"I suppose so. Had I known before I saw you last night that you were to be my criminal partner in pursuit of the casket and the gems, I should have brought that book as well as the Diary which I happened to have in my pocket. As it is, you might just step over to Rosen's and buy a copy. You will find it an amusing book during your long journey to St. Petersburg."

I looked at him with some annoyance.

"You take so much for granted," I remonstrated. "I shall need some persuasion. You

know, I suppose, that it's quite necessary for me to get a passport to travel in Russia. And as to our criminal pursuit, I take it that findings are keepings."

"Very true," he answered, looking at me cynically. "Beatrice, who wore some of our gems when she went into that cathedral over there, is dust these four hundred years and more. The line of the D'Estes and Sforzas is extinct. There is not a man or woman in Venice or Italy who may boast that a drop of the Doge's blood runs in their veins. Legally, I suppose, the state——"

"Oh, the state!" I sniffed contemptuously. "I don't mind putting my claims against the state!"

"Brave man! But let me remind you, my squeamish friend, that it may be necessary for you and me to use the jimmy before we get possession of those gems. Do you think we shall find them on the pavement? Hardly! They are hidden in one of these hundreds of palaces, and they will not be given up for the asking."

"I suppose not," I admitted reluctantly. "All the same, it has an ugly sound, the word criminal."

"I warned you that this was no task for the dilettante."

"Yes, yes, I know," I replied hastily. "But I am going to show you that I can be a bit unscrupulous, as well as you, on occasions."

"That's better," replied he, grinning at me. "Now about that book. As I said, it mentions da Sestos and his clock. But the Inquisition of Venice, I need not remind you, concerned itself not so much with the religious conscience of the individual as with affairs of the state. It is da Sestos, the criminal, who comes into this book; and only incidentally, da Sestos, the atheist, who made a clock that was inhabited by an evil spirit."

"And the story of Sanudo is substantiated?"

"Fairly well. And in this book we learn what became of the clock after his death. It was forfeited by the Inquisition as a thing unclean. It was hidden away in the Ducal Palace for nearly two hundred years."

"And afterward?"

"In a long foot-note the editor of the Annals tells us that at the entry of Napoleon it was looted by a captain of artillery, who afterward sold it to a dealer in Paris. It remained in the shop of the dealer for nearly half a century, when a learned antiquarian, who was writing an elaborate monograph on automaton clocks, came across it. This antiquarian, our editor tells us,

bought the clock and studied it. How it came into the possession of the uncle of the present Duke da Sestos is not known. This uncle, as the duke himself told us the other day, lived in Paris. He recognized the timepiece as that made by his remote ancestor nearly four hundred years ago."

"Recognized it? But how?"

"Nothing could be easier. In the first place, the name of the maker is on every clock. Then he may have been familiar with the monograph of the antiquarian. Or the antiquarian may himself have brought the clock to the attention of the duke. It is even possible that, as a Venetian, he may have read the Diary of Sanudo. At any rate, he sent the clock back to Venice."

"Did he guess the significance of the automata, do you suppose?"

"It seems probable that he did," replied St. Hilary thoughtfully. "Otherwise, why should the clock have been hidden in the secret chamber? It is likely that he told the father of old Luigi to guard it carefully."

"And does the editor himself hint at the automata's having any significance?" I asked, alarmed.

"Luckily not. He dismisses the whole sub-

ject as a myth, a mere superstition of the middle ages."

"All the same," I said, "if we could get hold of a copy of that monograph we might have a hint or two."

"Very true," quietly answered the dealer. "That is why you are going to St. Petersburg. The monograph is in the Imperial Library. There is only one copy known to be extant, our editor assures me. Useful man, our editor."

"Very," and I laughed shortly. "But what if the duke gets wind of this precious legend, and feels curious enough to try his hand at solving the riddle? If, for instance, he asks Mrs. Gordon for his clock again, we shall have a rival contestant for honors in mysteries."

"That is why we have no time to lose. Ah, the shutters of the clock-maker are down. At last we can examine your clock, and we shall be lucky if he hasn't ruined it," grumbled St. Hilary. He lifted the awning of the Arcade, and we stepped out into the glare of the Piazza.

Marruchi met me with apologies. No; he had not attempted to repair the clock. He had not even taken it to pieces. The mechanism was too intricate. In fact, he knew of but one clock-maker in the world to whom it might safely be entrusted.

"And he lives at Amsterdam," concluded St. Hilary complacently. "And now, perhaps, you understand, Hume, why it is necessary for one of us to go to Amsterdam?"

I hesitated. I remembered how he had attempted to obtain possession of the clock by subterfuge. How could I be sure that his sending me off to St. Petersburg was not a ruse to get me conveniently out of the way? Meanwhile he would have the clock, and when he had mastered its secret, he could return it to me with the assurance that it was but a myth after all. "Why should I not go to Amsterdam, and you to St. Petersburg?" That was the question that I might very pertinently have asked him. But I did not. I had promised to trust him. I trusted him now.

"Can you catch the afternoon express, Hume? It leaves at three-thirty and makes connections for St. Petersburg."

"I suppose so," I admitted reluctantly, "though I hardly relish our rushing off to the ends of the earth in this way."

"Oh, you of little faith," he cried testily. "If you are really going into this affair heart and soul with me, you will need a great deal more patience than a journey to St. Petersburg involves. As to my going to Amsterdam, you

heard Marruchi say there is just one clock-maker in the world clever enough to take our clock to pieces and put it together again without bungling."

"Very well," I assented soberly, and led the way to the Bureau Internationale des Wagon-lits to secure my sleeping-berth. But I must say St. Hilary's characterization of me was justified. I had faith enough to be curious about the clock here in Venice. But long and tedious journeys to Amsterdam and St. Petersburg—that was quite another matter.

CHAPTER X

St. Hilary had given me a letter of introduction to the director of the Imperial Library. Heaven knows where he had met him, but he seemed to know half the celebrities in Europe. I presented it in person. I have always found it useful to be referred—if one is to be referred at all—downward, rather than upward. One is more apt to strike a higher level of officialdom, and that means a more intelligent and enthusiastic service. In this case I was not referred downward at all. The director himself made inquiries for the precious volume. He returned in half an hour with apologies. The book was in use. To-morrow, no doubt, it would be at my disposal.

The mere fact that the volume was in use made me uneasy. Automaton clocks are not a particularly popular subject. At once I thought of the duke. Was it possible that already he had seen the book St. Hilary had just been speaking to me about? That seemed unlikely. But the next morning, when I was crossing the Dworzowy Bridge, once more on my way to the library, I met him face to face.

It is difficult to say who was the more surprised. Though my curiosity was unbounded to know if he were the person who had been studying up automaton clocks yesterday, I should have passed without speaking. But he advanced to me with open palm, and greeted me with unnecessary cordiality in French.

"And what brings Mr. Hume to St. Petersburg?"

I murmured something about studies in the Imperial Library.

At that he looked even more startled than when he first saw me.

"I, too, have been in the Imperial Library," he cried. "I have been reading a rare book there—one of the rarest in the world."

"Indeed! The book I wish to consult is also one of the rarest in the world."

It was a foolish hint, but I could not forbear the pleasure of giving it. Already I suspected that the duke was on the trail of the casket. Instead of being alarmed or annoyed, it gave me the keenest delight. Brain against brain. Wit against wit. Courage against courage. I could have asked nothing more to my liking. For instinctively I had felt the mettle of my foe and measured the chances of my rival for Jacqueline's heart.

At this bold challenge—it was nothing less—he started perceptibly. It was impossible to doubt further. But in an instant the mask had fallen over his face. He bowed with mock respect.

"Ah, Mr. Hume is a scholar?" he asked mockingly. "For me, I find the streets—its life and pleasures and peoples—more instructive than any books. Especially here in this strange, frozen north. Is there not an English poet who has said that the proper study of mankind is man? If he had said woman, he would have spoken the absolute truth. Yes, a beautiful woman is the apotheosis of fascination and interest for the man of fashion and heart. Leave the dull books for the priests and the dotards, my friend."

I had nothing to say to this essentially Italian summing up of the interests of life. We walked on a few steps in silence. We had crossed the bridge now. He took my arm.

"Yes, yes," he continued, "woman is the proper study of mankind. But when one meets a woman as lovely as the exquisite Miss Quintard—ah, knowing her, one knows all there is for one in life, is it not so?" and he pinched my arm familiarly.

I withdrew my arm angrily. I resented his

tone and his reference to Jacqueline. But I said nothing, only walked faster toward the Library.

"I have met many beautiful women in my life, but now I know there are no more worth seeing."

"And did you fathom the lady's charms so quickly—in the one short hour at the Palazzo?" I asked, a little spitefully, I am afraid.

"Fathom? Certainly not. But the vivid impressions of the hour may be deepened by the careful and delightful study of a week."

I stood quite still.

"Of a week?" I stammered.

"Of a week, my friend," he cried, enjoying his triumph. "For you must know that I have seen much of the fascinating Mrs. Gordon and her adorable niece at Bellagio. I happen to have a villa there."

At Bellagio! I drew in a deep breath, and it seemed to stab me. I had been wrapped up in the vain pursuit of a shadow, while that magnificent brute at my side, twirling his mustache up into his eyes, had been in the very presence of the goddess. I could not speak. I hope it was not jealousy that gnawed at my heart. Indeed, it was not jealousy at all, I think. It was rather fear—fear for my dear Jacqueline. Not simply

that she was to be won from me—had already been won from me, perhaps. If one whom I respected had gained her love, I do not think I should have cried out. But this Duke da Sestos! I trembled for her happiness. I knew that Jacqueline's aunt was the duke's ally. And Jacqueline herself? Women are at once so subtle and so dense. I have seen the noblest of them deceived by a charming manner—the cleverest wedded to a villain or a fool.

We reached the Imperial Library. The clock on a neighboring tower was striking ten when the doors of the Library opened and the director came out. I raised my hat. He returned my greeting courteously, and informed me that the book I wished was at last at my disposal. Unfortunately he mentioned it by name.

"And what interest has Mr. Hume in automaton clocks?" demanded the duke, when the director had turned his back.

I shrugged my shoulders, and bade him good afternoon.

"Mr. Hume, a moment, if you please."

I turned.

"Your hotel is the de l'Europe, I believe?"

"But unfortunately I am rarely at home," I said ungraciously.

"I am disappointed. We might have spent

an agreeable hour together in this barbarous capital. Au revoir."

I bowed, and went swiftly up the steps. Again he called me.

"By the way, Mrs. Gordon tells me, Mr. Hume, that she has entrusted the old clock to you."

"That is quite true."

He looked at me keenly.

"Ah, then, now I understand your interest in automaton clocks. Your interest awakens mine. I myself am anxious to see the clock again. When will you be in Venice?"

"In a month or two," I answered airily.

"A month or two, my dear friend!" he expostulated. "I must see my clock before that. I am thinking of having it repaired for Mrs. Gordon."

He emphasized the "my."

"I have thought of the same thing," I said evasively.

"But, Mr. Hume, I beg you to understand that it is with Mrs. Gordon's permission that I do so. Have you asked it?"

"Not yet," I replied coolly, going up a couple of steps.

His face darkened.

"Then, since I have Mrs. Gordon's permis-

sion, will you kindly write an order to your servant that he give it me on my return to Venice?"

"Unfortunately, that is impossible. You see, I have forestalled you. I have sent it to be repaired."

He stood a moment, twisting his mustache up into his eyes. Then, to my astonishment, he leaped up the steps, two at a time.

"Since, Mr. Hume," again he took my arm and almost forced me down the steps, "you question my word, I will telegraph to Mrs. Gordon and show you her answer. When I receive that answer, I shall come to your hotel and insist that you give me both the name of the maker to whom you have sent the clock and a written order to him that he deliver it to me. If you refuse, I shall be compelled to call in the police, and I am not unknown here in St. Petersburg."

"I am afraid I shall find a means to evade your police, Duke da Sestos," I said, laughing.

A moment he looked at me, puzzled, then, seeing my contempt for his threat, laughed also.

"La, la, it is true. I am a great fool. I might know that to threaten Mr. Hume is not the way to gain one's ends. Look, I threaten, I demand no longer. I beg. I throw myself on Mr. Hume's mercy. I confess I am most anxious to see the

clock. I take it for granted that Mr. Hume has had reasons for my not seeing it. But come, we will play fair. You have the clock, it is true. But, after all, I have the right to it. Let us grant, then, that we stand on even ground. Our rights to it are equal—your right, that of possession; mine, the moral and legal right. We will go together to the telegraph bureau. We will each of us telegraph to Mrs. Gordon for permission. She shall decide. Come, is that not sportsmanlike?"

"Hardly," I replied, laughing again. "The result would be too much a matter of certainty—for you."

"Ah, you are determined to be unfair," he cried angrily.

I hesitated a moment. Then I seized his arm.

"Come along, then," I said, still laughing, "we will go to your telegraph bureau."

It seemed the only way to get rid of him; but, I may say, I had no intention of abiding by the decision of Mrs. Gordon.

We entered the bureau. We stood at the desk, and each seized pen and paper. But before the duke had written a line, he had recognized an acquaintance in the street. I must excuse him one moment, and would I await his return so

that we might compare our telegrams and avoid any misunderstanding?

I waited ten minutes. Then, my telegram in my hand, I stepped outside the bureau and looked up and down the street. He was not in sight. I waited ten minutes more. Still the duke did not return. My patience was exhausted. I went back to the Library. But when I called for my book, to my extreme astonishment, it was again in use. It had, declared the attendant ungraciously, been reserved for me, but they could not hold it all the morning.

So this Italian duke had tricked me. The telegram was simply a ruse, a clumsy and senseless ruse, if you will, but I had been guileless enough to let it work. But it would not avail him long. Granted that he had delayed my seeing the book, all I had to do was to return in the afternoon. I walked back to my hotel for breakfast.

There the second surprise of the day awaited me. A telegram from Jacqueline had been sent to me to Venice, and retelegraphed to me at St. Petersburg by my housekeeper. It was sufficiently puzzling:

"*Please be sure to accept aunt's invitation for Friday. I am anxious to see you—most anxious. I shall expect you Friday—absolutely.*"

I held it in my hand, astonished and perplexed.

An invitation had been sent to me by Mrs. Gordon to visit her at Bellagio; I was to come on Friday; Jacqueline especially wished to see me. But why? Why should she expect me "absolutely"? Was it possible she had told Mrs. Gordon of my love for her? Dare I put the most favorable meaning into the message? At any rate, if I were to arrive at Bellagio on Friday, I must leave that afternoon. Well, after my breakfast, I could return to the Library, have a look at the monograph on clocks, and still catch the train.

But even as I was hurrying to the restaurant, I paused. Was this another of the duke's tricks, a more elaborate one? A moment's thought showed that this was most unlikely. I hurried through my meal, and taking a drosky returned to the Library, determined to wait there until I had seen my book.

This time, at any rate, the book was not in use, and in five minutes I had it in my hands.

I turned to consult the index. Apparently there was no index. I went through the volume carefully to find mention of the da Sestos clock, and presently I discovered that fourteen pages of the volume had been completely torn out.

I stared down at the mutilated book. So at last the duke's game was revealed in its beautiful

and simple entirety. He must have hurried back to the Library when he left me in the telegraph office. He, of course, had torn out the leaves. Score two for the duke. The game was becoming interesting.

When I called the attention of the librarian to the torn pages, he summoned the assistant who had given out the book. Did the assistant know that these fourteen pages were missing? The young man replied that he had noticed that yesterday. He had intended to speak to his chief about it. When asked if he could describe the reader, he replied that he could not. Pressed still further, however, he thought he remembered that the reader of the book had been an old man and had brown eyes. It was useless to say any more. It was evident that the assistant had been bribed and was lying. I might have given the librarian a hint or two as to what had become of those fourteen pages, but I wished to keep the police out of our game. Before long, perhaps, I might have to trust to the duke's generosity. In the meanwhile, I would go to Bellagio to learn why Jacqueline wished to see me so urgently.

CHAPTER XI

I saw no reason why I should inform either Mrs. Gordon or Jacqueline of my little trip to St. Petersburg. I greeted them both as if I had just come from Venice, and had duly received Mrs. Gordon's invitation. It may be readily imagined that I was curious to know why Jacqueline had added her urgent telegram in addition to her aunt's note.

But Jacqueline was never a primer to be spelled out with simplicity and accuracy. She met my anxious and significant glance—and I took care not to ask questions—with smiling and open-eyed composure. She was evidently relieved to see me, but she made no effort to see me alone. Rather, she seemed to avoid me; at least, until my visit drew to a close. That close was sudden and startling. My departure from the Hotel Grande Bretagne was nothing less than a dismissal.

It was not until after dinner that Mrs. Gordon gave me any clue as to why she had asked me to spend a few days with Jacqueline and herself at Lake Como. Just how long my visit was to

last I was in dubious ignorance. I was smoking my postprandial cigar on the terrace, wondering how I might tactfully sound the formidable Mrs. Gordon for this information, when she appeared with her niece. Jacqueline was reading a letter from home. Mrs. Gordon held up a jeweled hand impressively, and waved it significantly toward her.

"My dear, will you fetch me my shawl? Pray do not throw away your cigar, Mr. Hume. Be seated. I am anxious to have a talk with you."

My heart thumped ridiculously. Had Jacqueline confessed to her aunt her love for me?

I professed myself properly at her disposal. She cleared her throat and folded her arms across her ample person. Unconsciously she was assuming the airs of one of the Council of Ten. But that was Mrs. Gordon's way, and I waited expectantly.

"It is a great pleasure to have you with us, Mr. Hume," she began with ponderous cordiality.

I hastened to assure her that there was no place more beautiful than Como in April, and looked wistfully after Jacqueline, who had brought the shawl, and was now strolling about the shrubbery.

"You are the only person to whom I can turn in perplexity, that is, while we are here in Italy.

It so happens that I am sadly in need of advice and information."

I assured her that I would do all in my power to help her.

"It is with regard to Jacqueline."

I was careful to show nothing more than a friendly interest. One needed to be wary with the worldly Mrs. Gordon.

"Or, rather, it is with regard to Duke da Sestos."

"The Duke da Sestos!" I exclaimed, startled. "I can not see, Mrs. Gordon, how a matter touching the Duke da Sestos can affect your niece," I said after a pause.

"No?" She looked after her niece thoughtfully. "But if I tell you that the duke is in love with her, Mr. Hume?"

"And—and, her feeling toward the duke?"

"I have reason to believe that Jacqueline's wishes will coincide with mine," she answered complacently.

Jacqueline's wishes would coincide with hers! There was little doubt as to what her wishes were. So the worst had really come. I looked out toward the lake, hardly trusting myself to speak. The tender blue of the still waters; the purple mountains; the song of birds; the cries of children; the toll of a church-bell; and Jacque-

line, in white, slipping through the green trees—everything had charmed me only a moment ago. But now I saw only Jacqueline—not the laughing Jacqueline, my Jacqueline, who waved her hand back at me smiling, but the Duchess da Sestos, neglected wife, scorning her husband, and hating him, doomed to a slow and wretched death in life, sacrificed by this miserable old worldling.

"I could imagine nothing more unfortunate than that she should feel any interest in Duke da Sestos," I said with feeling.

She looked at me anxiously.

"Do you know anything derogatory to him, Mr. Hume?"

"No," I answered bluntly, "I know nothing of him."

She sighed out her relief.

A large person, with an English accent carefully modulated, Mrs. Gordon was not easily moved to anxiety. Her nerves were padded in leather. One could not prick them with anything less formidable than a pitchfork. But my remarks had ruffled her complacency for the moment, that colossal complacency as immense as her wardrobe, and silly and moveless as her pride. But even she would hesitate to encourage the duke's suit if I could show her it was quite

impossible. Could I do that? At least, I intended to try.

She pondered a moment. "So you know nothing. But it would not be difficult for you to make inquiries. Understanding Italian life, as you do, living in Venice so long——"

"Make inquiries, Mrs. Gordon?" I interrupted coldly. I should have thought my cool stare would have disconcerted her somewhat.

"And," she continued frostily (evidently the stare had been wholly in vain, then), "it seems to me that my appeal to you should be received in the light of a duty. You are one of our oldest friends. You ought to have Jacqueline's interests at heart."

"God knows I have her interests at heart," I cried bitterly. "But I fail to see——"

"Of his rank and station," she continued, waving my protest aside, "I can judge for myself. I am told he is a personal friend of the king. His family antedates the very founding of Venice. I know not how many quarterings his coat of arms may boast. As to his finances, that, naturally, is a serious question. I could not, as a matter of duty, permit myself to ignore that important phase of the case. Still, Jacqueline's *dot*, if she has due regard to my wishes, will not make his lack of means an insurmount-

able obstacle. But, Mr. Hume, his character, that is of importance."

"Yes," I said significantly, "it is."

"I do not mean," she hastened to add, "that —er—he—er—may not have been guilty of some of the indiscretions of youth. That is to be expected of a nobleman of his rank."

"Then, Mrs. Gordon, may I ask just what you do mean?" I inquired suavely.

"That at least there must have been no scandal, Mr. Hume, no open scandal. I could not permit dear Jacqueline's position to be in any way equivocal."

"Your concern as to that is most sensible," I said sarcastically. "Still, I am in ignorance as to just how I may help you."

"Really, Mr. Hume, you are strangely heedless of my words. Did I not say a moment ago that I looked to you to make certain inquiries for me?"

"In other words, Mrs. Gordon," I said coldly, "you are asking me to be your private detective, are you not?"

She held up her hands in horror.

"An office that I can not undertake, even for you or your niece. I can think of no marriage for Jacqueline that could possibly be more distasteful or more disastrous."

"If you know nothing about Duke da Sestos, how can you say that his possible marriage with my niece could be a misfortune? I may be very dense, but I fail to follow your reasoning, Mr. Hume."

"But, Mrs. Gordon," I said earnestly, "can you not guess something of a man's character without knowing all about him?"

"If I could," she answered slowly, "I should say that you do not appear to me to be quite disinterested in your statements."

"And if that is true, Mrs. Gordon?" I flung away my cigar and my caution. "If I confess that I am not disinterested, as you call it? What then? Say that I love your niece, and I suppose it is right that you should know that. My love for Jacqueline is great enough not to grudge her happiness, even if that happiness is to be with another man. But to see her persuaded into a marriage that every instinct tells me is wrong, that I know must prove unhappy—I can not allow that to be done without a protest, though in making that protest I have betrayed my own love for her. Mrs. Gordon, if I know nothing of Duke da Sestos, I do know something of his class. Can I say nothing that will influence you?"

She gathered her shawl about her, and looked

at me with stony indifference. I might as well have appealed to the little waves that lapped the shore. But I continued desperately:

"I can not help it that you misjudge me. I must speak. I must plead Jacqueline's cause for her, even though she should resent my doing that, for I am pleading for her happiness. You lay emphasis on the rank of this Duke da Sestos. He is a duke. But, Mrs. Gordon, there are seventy ducal houses in Sicily alone. There is no law of primogeniture in Italy. Titles carry no distinction with them. Princes, dukes, marquises, counts, they are infinitely more numerous in Italy than decent men.

"As to the character of this aristocracy—you ask me of the duke's, I will tell you the characteristics of most. He is an officer in the cavalry, therefore he lives beyond his pay. He is a gambler, a spendthrift. His property is mortgaged to the hilt. A rich marriage is his only hope. He hunts, shoots, wears English clothes, and that is as far as he approximates the manly habits of the Englishman. The Italian's idea of a sportsman is to ride to the meet in a dog-cart with a fat poodle at his side. The smaller the pony, the fatter the poodle, the more of a sportsman he is. Cards, gossip, his mistress—they make up his life, his real life."

"And supposing that all this is true, I do not forget that you are speaking of a class and not of an individual, Mr. Hume."

"I am only imploring you to be very careful."

"After you have refused to make inquiries? You are inconsistent."

She rose and confronted me with a placidity as obstinate as if I had not spoken.

"All that you have said I will try to put to the best of motives, but you have not shown a generous spirit. In my turn I must appear ungenerous, I fear. I must protect Jacqueline, and unfortunately, in my opinion, her marriage with you would be quite as disastrous as you pretend hers would be with the duke."

"I did not mean to speak ungenerously, Mrs. Gordon," I said humbly.

"And, as I was about to say, though it may appear ungracious, I am compelled to withdraw my invitation that you remain our guest here. Unless, of course, you will give me your promise that in no way——"

"I understand," I said stiffly. "I should not feel happy to stay under those circumstances. I shall leave to-night."

I bowed. Then I turned to her for a last appeal.

"Mrs. Gordon, it is natural that you should listen to me with suspicion, but try to believe that I speak disinterestedly. Do all you can to discourage Jacqueline. She is very young. She is romantic, like so many girls. It is so easy for her to make a mistake, if there is no one to guide, to advise. Take her away from Italy, at least for the present. Will you?" I held out my hand.

"Mr. Hume," she retorted spitefully, "in these affairs of the heart each must decide for oneself."

"Yes, yes," I cried eagerly. Then something in her strange smile made the words die on my lips, and I faltered, "Jacqueline has already decided that—that she loves the duke?"

"I have reason to believe so. The duke himself assures me that she has given him encouragement. More than that, Jacqueline herself does not deny it."

"Thank you," I said miserably, and went into the hotel to pack my things. The worst had come, then, for, much as I disliked Mrs. Gordon, I did not do her the injustice to suppose that she was lying.

Perhaps I ought to have trusted Jacqueline more. I should have known that no good woman listens lightly to a man's declaration of love; and

she had listened to mine. But, again, Jacqueline had given me no assurance whatever that she returned my love. She had found it difficult to make up her mind, not only as to whether she really loved me, but whether I were really in earnest in declaring my love for her. And so that evening I walked very soberly toward the steamboat-landing, followed by the porter with my bag.

The little steamer had given its warning toot, my bag was aboard, I was about to follow, when I turned, hoping for one last glimpse of Jacqueline. To my surprise, she was running toward me. She was in distress. In an instant I was at her side.

"What, what does it mean, you going away like this?" she panted.

"I am going back to Venice, Jacqueline," I answered her gravely.

"To Venice!" she cried, dismayed. "To Venice this evening, and without saying good-by to me? Why?"

"I have had a tiff, dear Jacqueline, with your aunt, and she has ordered me off. I leave the field," I added a little bitterly, "to a handsomer, and I wish I could say to a better, man."

She withdrew the hand she had given me, and flushed angrily. Then her face became very pale.

"Forgive me, Jacqueline, I did not mean to hurt you."

"And what has my aunt told you?" she almost whispered.

"She has told me, Jacqueline, that Duke da Sestos has asked you to be his wife. She wishes you to consent. She believes that you have not refused him."

Her color came and went. She drew in a little breath, and her brown eyes looked over at the mountains beyond Cadenabbia. Tears gathered in them and began to fall slowly down her cheeks.

"But it is not true," I cried, and seized her hand. "It is impossible that you should have done that."

"It is quite true," she said almost impassively. "He has asked me to be his wife. I have encouraged him."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. Good-by, dear Jacqueline."

She caught my coat in her eagerness.

"Listen, Dick. It is because of that I telegraphed you. You must help me. I need you. Would you do something for me that was quite useless—that would give you infinite trouble—that would bring you no reward except my thanks?"

"I think it quite possible," I said, smiling. "What is it?"

"It is so difficult to make you understand," she cried, distressed.

"I will wait till to-morrow."

"No, no; if you are to help me in this, you can not do it too quickly."

We began to walk toward the boat, which had emitted another piercing wail.

"I told you that Duke da Sestos has asked me to marry him, and that I encouraged him. I did. But, oh, so unconsciously."

"You encouraged him unconsciously? Impossible!"

"It is true, Dick," she insisted tearfully. "I wished to show him how impossible it was that I could ever care for him—that nothing but a miracle could make me love him. It happened that the steel chest he gave me from the Palazzo stood on the drawing-room table. Quite impulsively I said: 'When you bring me the casket that fitted into that steel box, I will listen to you.' I said it lightly, Dick, as a bitter jest. I thought I was asking him to do something quite impossible. To my surprise, to my dismay, instead of being indignant or angry, he took my words quite seriously. He refused to see that I had asked him to accomplish an impossibility. In that in-

tense foreign way of his, he kissed my hand, bidding me good-by for the present, but he promised me that, sooner or later, he would return with the casket. I was so astonished I could say nothing. Before I could recover myself he had gone. And if he should find it! Oh, Dick, if he should!"

I laughed joyously—happily. "He shall not," I cried, "because I am going to find it myself. And if I do find it, Jacqueline?"

"I shall be so glad," she said shyly.

"But my book of legends," I said with affected seriousness. "Am I to give up writing the legend of the clock? I thought I was to persist in my task. Nothing was to turn me from it."

"But I am giving you this new task, Dick," she said, laughing happily.

"Yes, yes," I said, as I leapt aboard at the last moment. "I think I may find time to do this new task for you, and my legend of the clock as well."

Not until the boat touched the farther shores of Lake Como did it occur to me that Jacqueline would think this promise but a half-hearted one. That there was any connection between the clock and the casket she had, of course, no idea.

CHAPTER XII

I REACHED Venice by the midnight express. St. Hilary was waiting for me on the platform.

"St. Hilary!" I cried with affected gaiety, "what brings you here at two o'clock in the morning?"

"Ah, what!" he grumbled. "Have you no imagination? But wait till we are in my gondola. You are going to your rooms, I suppose?"

We were scarcely seated when he turned eagerly toward me. His yellow face was haggard for want of sleep and lined like an old carved ivory, but in the pale light of the lamps of the landing I saw his eyes gleam.

"You are in good enough spirits to have good news. Come, no one can hear us now. Tell me of your little trip to Russia."

I recounted to him the story of my fruitless journey. He listened to me in silence. When I had finished, he drew aside the curtains of the gondola and looked out.

"I might have known that you would have just such ill luck," he said bitterly, and did not again speak until we had reached the Giudecca.

We entered the Grand Canal. One thinks of the Grand Canal as a *mise en scène* for endless processions of tourists. Your true *flaneur* shuns it. He keeps, as far as possible, to the cool blue shadows of the little canals.

But to-night this majestic waterway laid a fresh spell on me. It awed me. This silent stream, black as death, was full of mystery. A menace lurked in the deep shadows of the great palaces, pallid and ghostlike in the darkness. The steel prow of our gondola, curving upward proudly, dipped and glided through the inky waters. Is there in the whole world anything inanimate so graceful, so almost alive, so light and so cruelly sharp and strong as the prow of a gondola? It is the very incarnation of the spirit of the Venetians of the Renaissance.

To-night, as we penetrated the gloom that was absolute, except for the light of a tiny lantern on the deck forward, I could put myself back in the middle ages. I could see the black barge of the *Fante*, the captain of the inquisitorial guard, swiftly rowed with muffled oars to the palazzo of the unhappy wretch who had offended against the laws of Venice. The barge stops at his door; the bolts are slipped by a spy within; the messenger of torture and imprisonment, somber as the night, makes his way to the bedside

of the doomed man. He starts from his deep sleep; he is beckoned silently down the echoing stairs; he seats himself in the black barge; and so, shivering, he goes to his end.

We shot into one of the narrow, crooked little canals. And now our gondola scraped the very walls of the window-barred store-houses that once overflowed with the wealth of the Orient. It was impossible to think of myself as a simple gentleman with a letter of credit at my bankers. St. Hilary and I were marauders, adventurers, brawlers, and this prosaic umbrella between my knees was a long, keen blade, ready for a lively bout with the watch.

We were in the Giudecca now, dodging this chain and that of the shipping moored along the Fondamenta della Zattere. As we made for the shore opposite, the rain, which had been coming down in a gentle drizzle, fell smartly, and St. Hilary shouted to the gondolier to row faster.

Giudecca quarter is anything but fashionable. Gondoliers repeat the word twice with scorn when the tourist expresses a wish to go there. Steamers from Greece and America, laden with corn, are anchored along its quay. From early dawn to night, hundreds of barefooted stevedores, each with his sack on his shoulder, patter up the narrow plank that spans ship and shore.

An instant they poise their burden on the scale that stands at the doorway of the magazines, while an official from the customs-house jealously notes that it is full weight. Then shouldering it again, they are swallowed up in the cavernous interiors.

Most of the old palaces of the Giudecca have degenerated into these store-houses. But here and there, as a thing so insignificant that it is overlooked, one finds a low-ceiled *trattoria,* where at the noon hour the stevedores drink the strong wines of Chioggia and shout out their lusty songs; or it may be an infinitesimal shop, where sharp-faced old women sell fish and cheese and cherries.

All day long children sprawl and quarrel and play on the sun-baked pavement; and artists paint endless pictures of the red and orange sails drifting slowly by, with the Salute and Ducal Palace for a background. Yes, the Giudecca quarter is the quarter of the people. But to me the stevedores, the children, and the haggling old women have a charm all their own. And here, at the Casa Frollo where I lived, no red-booked tourist sets foot.

Our gondolier, winded with his long pull against wind and tide, steered for some steps a hundred feet this side the Casa Frollo. I called

to him to row farther up the quay, but St. Hilary irritably declared it easier for us to walk the distance than for him to row.

"But why walk in the rain?" I expostulated. "And how are you going to return to your hotel on the Riva if you dismiss your gondolier? Gondoliers hereabouts at two o'clock in the morning are as rare as horses on the Piazza."

"It happens that I don't intend to return to-night to my hotel. As a matter of fact there will be no bed for you, my dear Hume."

"No bed? It is not possible that you have already brought back our clock?"

"It is not only possible, it is true. I returned this evening in time to get your telegram and to meet you."

"You have had it repaired in a week?"

"Yes; so far as it could be repaired."

"Then there could not have been much the matter with it."

"As it happened, there was not."

"Then it seems to me that your trip to Amsterdam was not so very remarkable after all?" I grumbled.

"Sometimes," quietly replied St. Hilary, "one has to go to a great deal of trouble and expense to get a merely negative result. Sometimes it is necessary to find out simply what a thing is not."

"And have you found out that it is not, after all, an automaton clock?"

"My dear fellow, be reasonable. In the first place, this clock had to be set going. It was too intricate a piece of mechanism to entrust to any blundering workman. Are you going to find fault because it has been set going without any trouble or delay? Every wheel of its works had to be taken apart."

"And the object of that?"

"It was absolutely necessary that we should be certain that the secret of the clock, provided it has a secret, is told by the automata, and that this secret was not hidden in its works. Now, at least, we know what *not* to look for."

"The automata themselves, then, hold the secret?"

"So far as we can tell at present. The fact is, I have heard only two of the hours strike."

"And were the automata of the hours that you saw in working order?"

"One of them at least was, though, I confess, the result was slightly disappointing. However, I certainly did not expect the secret of the clock to be on the surface."

We walked up the quay in silence. Suddenly, as we were crossing a bridge, St. Hilary seized my arm, his familiar gesture always for silence

and caution. He looked over the parapet. Half a dozen black gondolas, swaying in the wind, were tied to rings in the wall. In one of them sat a man. A piece of tarpaulin protected him from the rain. As we looked at him he struck a match to light his pipe, and I saw his face.

"Did you ever happen to see that gondolier before?" demanded St. Hilary as we walked on.

"Never, so far as I know," I answered idly, peering through the rain for the landmark of Palazzo Frollo, two ridiculously small marble lions on the rail of the balcony of the second story.

"Hum, then perhaps I was mistaken. By the way, I met the duke on the Riva as I was going to the station to meet you."

"Indeed?" I said indifferently. I was fumbling for my night-key. I had insisted on that essentially Anglo-Saxon convenience, and the door had been fitted with a lock at my expense. I glanced up carelessly at the windows of my sitting-room, after the manner of one who has been away from home for a few days. A light was shining through the chink of the shutters. I pointed it out to St. Hilary.

"I remember you told me that you had brought the clock to my rooms. You left the lamp burning, I see."

"I? No."

"Then who can have been in my rooms?"

I heard St. Hilary chuckle in the darkness.

"Rather, say, who is in your room? *Pianissimo, mio caro.* It will be amusing to surprise this midnight guest. No, no; not a light, and silence."

My rooms were on the second floor. We had to pass through the sala, a huge apartment, at least forty feet long, a T-square in shape, and it extended from the canal to the garden at the rear, the smaller part of the T-square running along the side of the canal. The ceiling of immense beams stretched from wall to wall. Once these beams had been gaily decorated with geometrical designs; now they were dingy with a faded coat of whitewash. The room was lighted by the feeble rays of a night-lamp in a niche of the wall.

We tiptoed across the cold floor. Softly, very softly, I pushed down the straight handle of the door leading into my room. I drew this door cautiously toward me. A second door still hid us from the intruder, if intruder there was. Cautiously I pushed it ajar, and looked through the crack, St. Hilary squinting over my shoulder.

Duke da Sestos was seated in my room, and on a table immediately in front of him ticked the

clock. A lighted candle stood on either side of it. He sat huddled in the deep armchair, his head sunk on his breast. But he was not asleep. His elbows rested on the arms of the chair; his legs were comfortably crossed. A box of cigarettes was at his elbow, and at his elbow, too, a decanter of brandy—my brandy.

I closed the door, and at that moment we heard very faintly from within an exquisite chime of silver bells. Then the hour of one was struck.

"By Jove, St. Hilary," I said savagely, "is that brute to amuse himself all night, drinking my liquors, listening to the chimes of our clock, unmolested?"

"Not unmolested," chuckled St. Hilary softly.

"Ah, then, we stop his little game!"

"With all the pleasure in the world."

He took off his cloak. It was very thick and dripping with moisture. He nodded at me, smiling.

"Yes, yes, you get the idea? Could a troublesome guest cry out indignantly if this fine cloak kept his head warm, do you think?"

He spread out the cloak on one outstretched arm, and tiptoed to the door again. I followed at his heels.

"But is this necessary?" I expostulated. "Why not throw him out without any ado?"

St. Hilary looked at me with contempt.

"Do you forget the fourteen pages? We must see them. The chances are they are in his pocket. We are to be burglars for the nonce, dear Hume, and this cloak is to go over his head so that he won't be too noisy."

I nodded. "And the program?"

"It is very simple. His back is toward the door. When the next quarter chimes, I push open the door softly. I give a twist to my good cloak, and, *voila,* we shall have caught our prey. Blow out the candles, then help me. We shall wrap the cloak comfortably about his head, so that he can not see or hear. Then I go through his pockets. If the stolen pages are there, very good. If not, his keys may be useful. Have you a rope? We must fasten his arms and legs."

"Yes, a trunk-strap."

"Good. *En garde,* then. I am extremely thirsty. My poor lips ache for a smack of that good liqueur."

The clock chimed the half-hour sweetly. St. Hilary, holding the dripping cloak before him like a shield, pushed open the door.

CHAPTER XIII

St. Hilary did not bungle; and the cloak served admirably. The duke was no mean antagonist. As I placed my knee on his spine and twisted his arms back, while St. Hilary adjusted the bonds and the gag, I made up my mind that I should have to train down a little.

"And now?" I whispered, when we had trussed him up, for all the world like a fat fowl. It seemed to me rather useless and silly, all this fuss, and yet, I confess, I found it exciting.

St. Hilary shook his head for silence. One of the duke's cigarettes drooping at the corner of his mouth, he deliberately went through da Sestos's pockets. As I watched him, I shook with silent laughter. St. Hilary played his part with such boyish gusto. They made a picture, those two: the duke straining frantically at his bonds; St. Hilary, deft and cool, quite to the manner born, tapping this pocket and that, and emptying the contents of each in a little heap on the table —money, keys, letters. When he had glanced through the last, he conscientiously returned each

article to its respective pocket. Except the keys and the copy of a telegram. The keys he calmly transferred to his own pocket; the telegram he handed to me. I read it curiously:

"Please tell Mr. Hume that he is by all means to give you the clock at once."

It was signed by Mrs. Gordon, and was directed to the duke. I looked at it thoughtfully.

"Supposing, St. Hilary, that while reading this telegram the candle's flame happened to catch it. Naturally, I should let it go—like this," I whispered, and stamped on the burning paper.

"Wise young man," commented St. Hilary. "And now I am going to return the call of the duke. We are going to play our little game of tit for tat."

He put on his cloak, then, drawing its folds about him, he beckoned me out into the sala.

"Yes, I am off to our comedian's apartment. We must have those fourteen pages, if possible. Do you keep your eye on the duke there until four o'clock. Then let yourself down-stairs softly, very softly. Return noisily, very noisily. Imagine you have been dining, as the poet says, not wisely but too well. You will then be horrified to discover that our lord duke is blindfolded, strapped, and gagged. You release him with

cries of concern. You are all sympathy. We have done our work skilfully enough so that he can not know we are the aggressors. It is true, he may guess. I shall return here to-morrow morning, probably not before noon. We shall need a few hours' sleep. I hope I shall bring those fourteen pages with me, then we can amuse ourselves with our clock.

"But our beast of prey in there. Though he can not see or move, don't forget he can hear. Keeping still until four o'clock in the morning does not appeal to me in the least. Why not shut him up in my coat-closet until it is time to release him?"

"Excellent."

We entered my room again, and, in spite of his struggles, stood the duke upright in the narrow closet. Then, leaving him standing there like a mummy, we turned the key on him and left him to his reflections.

"Now I'm off," whispered St. Hilary.

When he had closed the door behind him, I took the seat in front of the clock. I waited for the clock to strike the hour of two.

The silver bell struck the three-quarter-hour. The minutes dragged on. As I sat there, staring at the clock, my eyes on its face, it seemed a thing sinister, half alive. Its yellow face took on a

look that was half human. It made faces at me. It mocked me.

And then at last a spring whirred. The little silver bells, sweet as an elfin chime in fairy-land, shocked me into rigid attention. It was two o'clock. I watched the doors eagerly.

At first I thought none of the twelve doors had opened. I forgot for the moment that the door of the second hour was at the side of the clock. I moved the candle to the side. Yes, the door was wide open. I thrust the rays of the candle at the little doorway, and I saw—what?

A circular platform was being pushed slowly forward. On this platform was a tiny throne in silver. At the foot of this throne a bronze figure crouched abjectly. Another figure stood upright at the base of the throne. In his two hands the upright figure clutched a sword. As the clock struck twice, the sword was raised high above his head, with a droll, mechanical jerk. It descended twice on the neck of the crouching figure. Then, very slowly, the platform retreated into the doorway. The door closed.

That was all. A dollar cuckoo clock is hardly less impressive or more ridiculous. A figure hacks with a sword at a figure complacently kneeling to receive the blow—that was all! But was it all? Was there not, behind the little

figure, a background of bronze, a drop-curtain, so to speak? And on the background was there not something in bas-relief? I felt quite sure that there was, though the two automata must be the principal actors in the foolish scene. I jotted down as much as I could remember, and waited for three o'clock to strike.

But if the previous hour was disappointing, this was maddeningly so. This time I had the two lighted candles standing at the third door, that not a fraction of a second might be wasted.

Again the whirr of the spring and the chime of bells. The third door opened slowly. The circular platform was pushed out again. A single figure this time. I watched it, breathless, and it did—nothing. It stood there motionless. But at the second glance I saw that it was designedly motionless. It was not an automaton. It was simply a piece of bronze cast in the shape of an old man in a flowing robe. The Doge's cap was on his head. His right arm was lifted as if gesticulating. And as the hours struck, there appeared from the rear of the platform, in quick succession, tiny round disks. They sprang into line from within one after the other. Before the door closed I counted ten of them. They stood in a row, facing the immovable figure. There was again a bronze plate at the back. At first

I thought it was ornamented with a geometrical design. But as I looked at it more closely, I saw that it was a gate. This scene was more tantalizing than the last. When the clock had been in perfect repair the ten disks must have been the basis for ten automata, much after the fashion of the Noah's Ark men of our childhood. Naturally, the ten figures suggested the Council of Ten, and the single figure the Doge. But one would need some imagination to guess their significance. The clock might have a wonderful secret to tell, but it would take a genius or extraordinary luck to puzzle it out.

The clock ticked complacently. It seemed to jeer at me with its clacking rhythm. I lighted one of the duke's excellent cigarettes. My nerves had been spurred to an ecstasy of excitement. I had expected wonderful things to happen. Nothing had happened. Nothing, I said to myself, was going to happen. I was very sleepy. The irritating tick-tock sounded far away. I nodded in my chair.

The whirr of the spring and the silver chime aroused me. I leaned forward languidly, cynically, rubbing my eyes. The first of the six doors in front opened. This time no automaton appeared. In the background I made out some monster. a well-curb, and a tree. The door

closed slowly. I laughed aloud. St. Hilary and myself had been mad to dream that after almost five centuries the clock could tell its secret, if indeed it had a secret to tell.

I yawned, blew out the candles, put on my overcoat and hat, and slipped down-stairs. It was time to let the duke out of his box.

CHAPTER XIV

I WALKED a few rods from the house, hugging the wall. Returning noisily, I pulled the bell half a dozen times. True, I had my key in my pocket, but just now it would have been as well to have left it at home. All the world must know I had just returned from my journey.

I had to wait five minutes before the frowsy head of my housekeeper peered over the balcony. In the meanwhile, I discovered another head looking at me from over the edge of the quay. By the rays of the lantern at my door I recognized the face staring at me intently as that of the man whom we had seen smoking under the bridge. He was the duke's gondolier. He was waiting for his master.

Then he knew the duke was in my rooms. That was awkward. Had he seen me come out of the house? Nothing was more likely. What if his master should question him, presently, if he had seen any suspicious characters about? What if the man told his master that he had seen me come sneaking out of the house one minute, to return noisily the next? When he described

me, what would the duke naturally infer? And if, still later, the duke discovered that St. Hilary had paid this midnight visit to his room? Well, at any rate, he would be assured that we were really in earnest. He would know that if the casket was to be found, he was not the only one who was looking for it.

I stepped into the hall and banged the door after me. I stumbled up the stairs. I clattered across the sala. I sang. I lurched into a table. I fell with a crash against the closet-door in which the duke was imprisoned. There was no doubt about my having come home this time. Even the duke in his narrow box must have heard me. I lighted a candle, and taking off my coat and waistcoat, I held them in front of me with one hand and flung open the closet-door with the other. I was prepared to express surprise. I had an exclamation conveniently on my lips. It so happened that my surprise was genuine. As I opened the door the duke toppled over limply into my arms. He had fainted.

I let him slip to the floor. I unbound his wrists and legs. I tore off the gag. I chafed his hands. I poured water over his face. Upon my word, between us we had well-nigh smothered the chap.

He opened his eyes presently. Sitting up, he

blinked at me. Slowly the pallor left his face. He glanced about the room; he shook himself together, rose to his feet, laughed lightly, and, walking over to the table where his cigarettes lay, he lighted one, and inhaled it deeply.

"Ah, my friend Hume, that was not a pleasant half-hour. I must thank you, my deliverer."

I shook hands rather guiltily. I noticed that he was curiously examining his cigarettes.

"The thief has been helping himself," he said carelessly.

"Thief?" I cried, alarmed, and rushed to my bedroom. I threw out the contents of a drawer or two, and came back into the sitting-room, the picture of despair.

"Yes, thieves," I said feebly, as I sank into a chair. "A diamond scarf-pin, a watch, a few hundred lire—all stolen."

"*Mio caro*," he cried hypocritically, seizing my hands.

"But how did you get into my closet?" I demanded.

"My dear Mr. Hume, do you think I walked in there?"

"I suppose not," I answered dryly; "but I suppose you walked into my sitting-room?"

He was voluble in his excuses. He had come on a little errand. He must have fallen asleep.

He remembered nothing till he was seized and bound and robbed.

"So they have robbed you, these thieves?" I asked indiscreetly.

"Yes; they have taken my keys," and he looked at me keenly.

"Your keys!" I expostulated. "What would they do with your keys? You must have left them at home."

"Perhaps. *Eh bien,* Mr. Hume, I must bid you good night. I must walk, I suppose, to the Tragetto Ponte del Piccolo for a gondolier. Why, my friend, do you dwell in this barbarous Giudecca?" Then his eyes fell on the table, where the clock ticked loudly. "Ah ha, my old clock, and it goes. Capital! I had quite forgotten my errand."

"And that is?"

"To deprive you of my clock, my friend. Do you forget that we were to telegraph Madame Gordon in St. Petersburg? Oh, la, la, you did not wait for me at the bureau, I remember. That was not the act of a sportsman." He shook his head reproachfully.

"I thought it was you who did not wait for me," I said dryly. "And have you yet received an answer to your telegram?"

"But yes. Behold!" He fumbled in his

breast-pocket, and sorted rapidly a package of letters and papers. "*Accidenti!*" he cried, "it is not here."

"No doubt you left it at home with the keys," I said coolly.

"Eh? At home with the keys?" He looked at me with half-shut eyes.

"Why not?" I asked, yawning, and casting a longing eye toward my bedroom.

He began to laugh boisterously. "It is a matter to laugh over that thieves should rob one of a telegram and one's keys, *hein?*"

"Decidedly," I said uneasily.

"But it will be the simplest thing in the world for me to get another telegram," he cried mockingly. "The thieves will not inconvenience me in the slightest. And as to their going to my rooms, bah, I am not so big a fool as to leave anything of interest there for an intruder to gaze at. No, Mr. Hume, not so big a fool as that. By the way, did you find your bibelot, that rare bibelot in the Imperial Library, interesting?"

"I did not take the trouble to go back for it," I lied carelessly. "A telegram from Miss Quintard recalled me to Bellagio."

I startled him as I had intended to. His face darkened. He looked at the clock again.

He had heard the spring whirr metallically.

The bells began to strike. Instinctively we both turned, and watched the fourth door open slowly. Again the figure on the platform had been broken off. What the background was I could not see. I dared not show too great curiosity before the duke.

The door closed. The duke and I looked at each other.

"It is interesting, all the same, my droll old clock."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I see that you have had it repaired."

"I was wondering if that fact would dawn on you," I said.

"Am I to understand that because you have had the clock repaired, my right to it is the less real?" he inquired, an ugly gleam in his blue eyes.

"You are to understand precisely that," I replied. "And permit me to remind you, first of all, that this clock is not yours. It is now Mrs. Gordon's. She has asked me to keep it for her. I shall take whatever steps I may think necessary for its safe keeping. I am beginning to think that it is valuable when people break into my rooms to observe it."

"Break into your rooms?" He looked at me angrily.

"I beg your pardon," I said suavely. "I was thinking, of course, of the thieves."

He bowed. "A very natural mistake. *Felice noce.*"

"Good night, duke." We pressed each other's hands warmly.

But at the door he turned.

"Mr. Hume, do you not think that when people resort to the extreme measures of binding one and shutting one up in closets they must be decidedly anxious that one shall not see things?"

"Without a doubt," I retorted airily. "As, for instance, when they tear leaves out of library-books."

Again we bowed. So we understood each other.

I threw open my shutters and looked out. The duke was stepping into his gondola. Evidently he saw it was useless to sail longer under false colors. He waved to me familiarly.

It was a superb morning. The rain had been blown away. Venice had robed herself in glory, and proudly enthroned herself as the great enchantress, the magician of the seas.

I threw myself wearily on my bed for a few hours' sleep. The clock might strike as it would. I was disgusted with its antics.

CHAPTER XV

It was long past noon when I was awakened by St. Hilary.

"Well," I asked sleepily, "have you had any luck?"

"None whatever. The duke's belongings were packed. His rooms were dismantled. If you remember, he has been living at Bellagio the past few days. He has a villa there."

"So you have no trace of the missing papers?"

"No trace," he replied gloomily. "But tell me of your own adventures with the duke."

"It appears," he said ruefully, when I had finished, "that the duke has had the advantage of us after all. But at least we have the clock."

"Yes," I echoed sarcastically, "we have the clock. But it seems to me that the childish contrivances one sees sold on the boulevards of Paris for ten sous are as ingenious. I have heard it strike four of the hours, and each hour's results were more disappointing than the last."

"Did you expect to find its secret on the surface, like the pebbles on the sea-shore? There

are pebbles on the shore, yes. But, my friend, a poet has said we must dive for the pearls."

"The automata are all more or less broken," I grumbled. "We gained precious little by our trips to Holland and Russia, I think."

"I don't call my trip a failure."

"But your Dutch clock-maker didn't repair the automata," I insisted.

"Very true. But he was able to assure me what I had already guessed and hoped might be true—that the antics of the automata, even when the clock was in perfect order, could never have amounted to much. Their various movements, however droll and amusing, were too simple to have much significance."

"The automata have no significance!" I repeated testily. "Why, I thought the fact that the clock as an automaton clock was precisely the significant point. If the automata amount to no more than a row of pins, how the devil is the clock to tell its secret?"

"My dear Hume," returned St. Hilary quietly, "they may amount in the end to a row of diamonds. I did not say that the automata have no significance whatever. On the contrary, they are perhaps the principal actors of each scene. But the chorus of each scene is to be found in the bas-reliefs that appear on the bronze plates form-

ing the backgrounds. If we grant that, the office of the automaton figures is chiefly to identify the twelve scenes in the bas-relief."

"But if that is true, shall we be able to identify the scenes in the backgrounds when the automatic figures are missing?"

"It will be difficult to do so, certainly. But I believe these automata have a purpose more subtle than that. If my theory is correct, the mad goldsmith would not tell his secret by the uncertain means of a lot of dancing and gesticulating figures. The mechanism would be too intricate and delicate to stand the test of wear and time. It is most probable that the automatic figures, while serving the subsidiary purpose of identifying the various scenes in the backgrounds, are really a bluff. They are a blind to rob the backgrounds of their significance. They are designed to catch the attention of the unwary. The unthinking man, held by the movements of the figures themselves, would look no farther."

"That is a really ingenious theory, St. Hilary," I said admiringly.

"Be sure of this," replied the dealer complacently, "the riddle that man has been ingenious enough to devise, man is ingenious enough to solve."

"Granting always that it is a consistent riddle."

"And I have enough faith in my goldsmith to believe that," said St. Hilary obstinately. "But it is three minutes to one. The clock is about to strike."

We watched the first of the doors open, the circular platform pushed out. A headless figure stood motionless, its right hand resting on a lion's head. At the stroke of the hour, the beast lifted its paw and dropped it again. The headless figure wiggled its left hand. Then the platform solemnly retreated, and the door was noiselessly shut.

"Doesn't that simply cap the climax for exquisite inanity?" I cried.

"It is silly enough to bear out my theory. The raising of that lion's paw, the ludicrous wiggling of the solemn figure's hand, can not possibly have any meaning."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"Because the gestures were made but once. But you observed the background?"

"It was simply the Ducal Palace," I said indifferently, "which of itself may mean much or nothing."

"Precisely. It is the figure and the lion that give the scene its vital touch. Any schoolboy

could have recognized them. They stand, of course, for San Marco, the patron saint of Venice, and his lion. And now, let us get to work. Our first step must be to make ourselves familiar with every detail of each scene of the hours."

"Since the automata are useless, and, in most of the hours, are missing entirely, why should we not take flashlight snap-shots of the twelve backgrounds? We could then study them at our leisure."

"Excellent. But the camera?"

"I have a very good one with an admirable lens. I can take the pictures myself. These photos we can always carry about with us on our person. There will be no danger of the duke's stealing those. But the clock, we can't keep guard over it all the time. The duke will surely insist on its being given up to him sooner or later. If necessary, he will call in the police."

"Hume, you are an inspiration. What's your idea for getting rid of it?"

"If I shipped it to America for Mrs. Gordon, ought she not to be grateful to me for saving her that bother?"

"But the duke could readily prevail on her to cable to America to have it sent back to her. The ruse would give us a month's start, it is true; but what if we shouldn't find the casket in a month?"

"I have thought of that. If it were sent to a wrong address, by mistake, or to your shop, for example? And if you sent instructions that the box was to be put carefully away until your return?"

"My dear fellow, you are a jewel of thoughtfulness. Take your flash-lights immediately; and when you have made twelve perfect pictures, we will pack the clock, and see ourselves that it is safely started on its long journey to America. Until then, one or the other of us must guard it day and night."

I took the twelve flash-lights. They were a perfect success. Two days later the clock was boxed, labeled "Glass, with care," and on its way to Genoa, whence it was to be shipped to New York.

On the same steamer was a letter from the dealer to his partner, advising him that a box containing an article of value had been shipped that day, and instructing him to have it stored away carefully until further orders. All information concerning it was to be absolutely withheld.

We acted not a day too soon. Our duke appeared again; this time armed with legal authority. I expressed the profoundest regret, but how could I dare to keep so valuable an antique

longer in my possession, since I had reason to know that thieves had already forced their way into my rooms to steal it? The duke stormed and threatened. I smiled at him blandly. When he asked me where I had sent it, I informed him that I had despatched it to New York, in the care of St. Hilary's partner. As to the instructions St. Hilary had given his partner, the dealer in antiques would doubtless tell him what they were, since he had written them. St. Hilary lied, cheerfully and absolutely, asserting that he had sent orders to his partner promptly to surrender the clock to any person bearing a signed note from Mrs. Gordon.

CHAPTER XVI

For a week St. Hilary scarcely left my room. He ate little; he smoked boxes of cigarettes; he consumed pots of black coffee. Such sleep as he had he snatched for an hour at a time in my arm-chair. And always in front of him were the photographs of the backgrounds of the twelve hours.

As for me, I waited on him hand and foot. I was a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. Now I went to Rosen's to buy some volume, now to Organia's to borrow a collection of rare prints, now to the Museo Civico to consult the director. The archives of the Frari, the Academy of Arts, each of them saw me often. In the morning, perhaps I looked at a picture of Carpaccio or Bellini; in the afternoon I explored an obscure *canaletto*.

I was content to take the humbler position. St. Hilary had a right to command. His had been the discovery that made the search possible. Again, it seemed fit that his quicker brain

should catch the fire, the inspiration. I did not doubt but that sooner or later from the mass of lifeless evidence, which he was heaping about him, he would surely draw forth the secret.

But now, after a week of fruitless searching, his chin a reproach, his hands trembling, and his temper a thing to be respected, he leaned back in the chair and despaired.

"It is useless," he sighed. "The thing is not to be done in a day or a week. I have not the art of divination. Sometimes I feel that I am on the right track. I grope; I touch something; I clutch at it, but it eludes me, always. There stands the ticking, mocking braggart. It laughs at us with its brazen wheels; it mocks us with its silver tongue. I believe that the spirit of the mad goldsmith actually dwells in its hollow sides."

And yet, in spite of St. Hilary's despair, we had accomplished something.

Of the original automata of the twelve hours we had found four only to be in actual working order. In three of the hours, some of the figures were intact, and some were broken. In the five remaining hours, the figures were completely lacking.

To consider the four hours with the figures intact, namely, 1, 2, 6, 7:

1.—A robed figure and a lion. The lion nods once.

2.—A figure standing over a kneeling slave in an attitude of menace, twice strikes the neck of the slave with a sword.

6.—A dancing figure advances ten steps forward and retreats ten steps.

7.—A dove appears at the window of a tower.

In hours 3, 8, 9, some of the figures were intact, some broken:

3.—A robed figure seated in a chair. Before this figure, designedly motionless, ten disks appear in succession, and are ranged in a row. The figures are broken off the disks.

8.—A crowned figure standing on a dais before a throne. A second figure at the foot of the throne is broken off.

9.—A seated figure with a scepter.

In hours 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 there was not the slightest fragment of the figures remaining.

So much for the automata.

The scenes of the bas-reliefs of the backgrounds were as follows:

1.—A palace, plainly the Doge's palace. Seven arches of the palace are seen. Beneath six of these arches groups of men are standing —ten figures in each group, or sixty in all.

2.—A hanging.

3.—A gate.

4.—Three trees; a beast of burden, probably a camel; a well.

5.—Badly mutilated.

6.—Two figures seated on the balcony over the doorway of San Marco. One figure wears the Doge's cap; the other is crowned with a wreath of laurel.

7.—A barge on a stormy sea.

8.—An empty room in a palace. The door is open; no figures are seen.

9.—Thirteen kneeling figures with outstretched hands.

10.—Six gondolas in procession; tritons spouting.

11.—Mutilated.

12.—Three figures holding out bags.

Such were the automata and the bas-reliefs in the backgrounds of the twelve hours.

As to the scenes they represented, St. Hilary had made a rough guess at most of them. Four or five of the scenes he thought he had identified unmistakably. All twelve of them were scenes out of Venetian history. When I urged him for the results he had gained so far, he declared at first that they were too meager to be suggestive. But I was not to be balked.

"I have been running your errands for a week,

St. Hilary," I reminded him. "I have been your obedient messenger—an intelligent messenger, if you will—and I have left you to do the piecing together of the different parts of the puzzle. Now I want to know what you have accomplished."

"There is very little to tell," he said sulkily. "Scene one represents St. Mark and his lion, the tutelary saint of Venice. As to the second scene, the story is in every guide-book. The artist Gentile Bellini visited the Sultan of Turkey, and painted for him a picture of the daughter of Herodias bringing in the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger. The Sultan objected that the neck was not rightly drawn—that when a man was beheaded, no neck appeared at all, in fact. The artist disputed the point. To prove himself in the right, the Sultan struck off a slave's head."

"And the third hour—the ten disks arranged in a row?"

"The Council of Ten, I suppose."

"Well, well, the fourth, St. Hilary?" I cried sharply.

"Perhaps you know its significance. I don't. The camel doesn't figure in Venetian history, so far as I know. It is true, Marco Polo traveled to the Great Khan of Cathay. The scene might

have been a chapter out of his life. But after wading through his travels I have failed to find it."

"And the next, I suppose, is too badly mutilated to be identified?"

"Absolutely," he grumbled.

"And the background of the sixth hour?" I asked, studying the photograph through a powerful magnifying-glass. "Have you been able to identify either of the two figures seated on the balcony?"

"Both," he replied with more animation. "The figure with the Doge's cap is Dandolo. The figure crowned with a wreath of laurel by his side represents the poet Petrarch, who was his guest. The automatic figure that dances the ten steps forward and backward symbolizes a festival held on the Piazza after Venice had subdued her enemy Crete."

"The seventh hour represents," I ventured, "the legend of the Doge receiving news of victory by a carrier-pigeon. Every child who feeds the creatures on the Piazza knows that story. The tower must be the Campanile."

"Quite right. The scene of the eighth hour," continued St. Hilary, "you discovered for yourself in the Academy this morning. The room of the palace in the background is an exact re-

production of the palace seen in the painting of Carpaccio."

"And the ninth?" I demanded, feeling that our information was meager indeed.

"Here, again, we can only guess. The broken figure may be Carmagnola, the soldier of fortune. The thirteen figures kneeling in the background no doubt typify his conquered enemies. The procession of the gondolas and the spouting tritons in the tenth probably represent the going of the Doge in his bucentaur to wed the Adriatic."

"And the eleventh hour must be quite hopeless. The automaton is missing and the plate at the back is battered beyond all recognition," I said moodily.

"The twelfth is almost as obscure," concluded St. Hilary. "The figures holding out the bags are perhaps conquered Genoese offering ransom."

"It is not very promising," I confessed. "Have you any theory whatever as to the meaning of these scenes?"

"I have a dozen. But they are all equally impossible."

"Let me hear one of them, at least," I urged.

"Well, then, if I repeat to you the numbers 10, 4, 7, 21, 1, 10, 3, 40, of what do you at once think?"

"A cipher," I cried eagerly.

"That is the theory that seems to me the most hopeful at present. The numbers I have mentioned are the figures of the different successive scenes. It is barely possible that these numbers, either alone or combined with other numbers, might bring us to the hiding-place of the casket. The trouble is that not every scene has figures in the background. The eighth, for instance. And in hours five and eleven, the backgrounds are so mutilated that, even if this theory were true, we should lack those numbers to make our cipher complete."

"And yet the existence of a cipher seems the only possible way by which the riddle may be solved."

"I believe that is true. There are twelve hours, that is, there are twelve different steps—twelve different links to the whole chain. Beginning at hour one, so many steps, paces, or what not, ought to bring us to hour two. There, beginning afresh, so many steps, paces, and so forth, again ought to bring us to hour three, and so on. Do you get the idea?"

"It sounds reasonable," I replied thoughtfully. "But since two or three scenes are missing, I can not see much promise in this theory."

"I told you that they were all impossible,"

growled the dealer. "So far we are quite at sea. To-morrow, perhaps—" he sighed wearily.

"To-morrow perhaps we shall have better luck," I said cheerfully. "It is always darkest before the dawn."

"*Pas de banalités.* I am not a Sunday-school scholar to be preached at. Come, let's to dinner."

CHAPTER XVII

THREE weeks passed before we made any further progress. A clue, but always an imaginary clue, would prick us into feverish activity, which invariably led us nowhere.

But toward the end of the third week of our search, St. Hilary came to my rooms one afternoon, triumphant. He had actually made a discovery. And this discovery proved, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, not only that the clock had a story to tell, not only that the twelve hours actually did constitute twelve links of a chain, but that somewhere, in the background of each hour, there was some mark corresponding to a like mark in some part of Venice.

"It is only a little clue," he said with affected modesty, "a very little one. But who knows that it may not be the wedge that shall pry open our treasure-box?"

"Produce this wedge by all means," I said skeptically.

"This morning, about half past ten, I found

myself in the Campo San Salvatore—you know it, the little square with the house of the gaily painted balcony and the roses on the north side. At the left of the square, going toward San Marco, perhaps you remember, there is a boys' school. You may have observed a respectable old servant who walks solemnly up to the big bell on the left of the door, leading a little boy by the hand. He always rings the bell at eight o'clock in the morning. When the door is opened he hands the school-books to his charge, shakes his finger at him, and toddles off to the seller of sweetened water at the corner for a drink."

"Has this respectable old man anything to do with your precious discovery?" I asked impatiently.

"A great deal to do with it. This morning, as I was saying, I caught sight of my old man and the young gentleman. My eyes dwelt on them affectionately while the servant rang the big bell, and shook his forefinger at the smiling boy. Now observe, my dear Hume; if I hadn't met my old man, I should have hurried through the square. In that case I should have missed the boy with the fish."

"Oh, there is a boy with a fish, is there?" I remarked.

"Yes," he said severely, "there is a boy with

a fish. While I stood watching the old man, a stream of curses and abuse in the Venetian dialect disturbed my pleasant reflections. I turned, and there, at the open door of a large house, stood a barefooted boy with a flat basket of fish. Two servants were shrieking at him like the very devil. The fish was bad, perhaps, or the boy had given the wrong change. I do not know. The point is that the old servant, the seller of sweetened water, who left his stand, and the dark-eyed gipsies at the well, who left their buckets, came to look on. The bad little boy with the fish didn't like this publicity. Especially when a majestic policeman with a long feather in his round hat——"

I groaned. "Is the majestic policeman with the long feather in his round hat absolutely essential?"

"The majestic policeman with the long feather in his round hat is absolutely essential," said St. Hilary with an amused drawl.

"Even the long feather in the round hat?" I could not resist asking.

"Especially the long feather in the round hat, as you will see if you are patient. For this majestic policeman came on the bad little boy quite unawares, and, seizing his ear, he made him a prisoner. Then the youngster wrenched himself

free, only to run headlong into another policeman who was coming from the Calle San Rosario. The *spighetti,* compelled to double on his tracks, plunged recklessly into the first opening that offered. This happened to be the gate leading into the school garden, that chanced to be wide open. Now, we thought, the youngster will surely be caught, and when the policeman with the long feather in his hat languidly strolled after his prey, the rest of the square pressed respectfully after to see the fun. But the young ragamuffin had the policeman now quite at his mercy, for he lost himself immediately among threescore of boys at play. So that presently, while the policeman was vainly searching the garden for him, the bad little boy regained the entrance. He cast one cautious eye into the square to be sure that the second policeman had disappeared, and then, after the manner of small boys the world over, he held his thumb and fingers extended at the majestic policeman, and called him naughty names."

"A beautiful little sketch of low life in Venice," I said sarcastically. "But I fail to see even yet the pertinency of the long feather in the round hat."

"Patience, my friend. When he had sufficiently insulted the majestic policeman in this

manner, he took one of his mullets, and hurling it with precision——"

"Struck the round hat with the long feather."

"—Missed the round hat with the long feather," corrected St. Hilary with calm precision, "but struck the long feather on the round hat. It hung pitifully, a draggled and wobegone bit of finery; and those of us who had followed him into the court naturally regarded it with respectful sympathy. And then my heart came into my mouth. The broken feather was pointing, as it were a human hand, straight to a round——"

"Not another round hat?" I cried in despair.

"—Straight to a round stone let into the wall. And on this round stone was carved a camel's head, the precise image of the camel's head in this photograph of the background of the fourth hour."

St. Hilary looked at me in triumph, and, picking up the photograph, thrust it into my hand.

"The precise image of the camel's head in this photograph," I repeated, trying to grasp the significance of that statement. "But why should you think that the clock-maker copied the head of that particular camel in the background of the fourth hour? My dear St. Hilary, your in-

troduction was too elaborate for your news to be striking. I expected something more startling."

"But, idiot," cried the dealer, exasperated, "look at the photograph. Do you see nothing peculiar about that camel's head?"

I took the magnifying-glass and studied the photograph carefully.

"Nothing—unless it be the eye. Perhaps it is a defect in the workmanship. But it looks—yes, it certainly does look as if the camel was blind."

"The camel carved on the stone let into the wall of the house is blind also."

"This *is* news, if it is not the merest chance," I cried.

"And before the house was used as a school, it was called the House of the Blind Camel."

"The House of the Blind Camel!" I repeated excitedly. "By Jove, St. Hilary, does that mean you have stumbled on one of the twelve landmarks?"

"Patience. Look at your photograph again. What else do you see in the background of the fourth hour?"

"A well," I answered promptly. "If you have found the well, there can be no doubt."

"And I *have* found the well. Look at the

photograph. What is the design of the beading round the curb?"

"A looped wreath with pomegranates between each loop."

"The well in the school garden has a beading of the same design. But study the photograph a moment—look carefully at the second and third pomegranates from the left. Do you notice anything peculiar?"

"No, I see nothing peculiar about them."

"The more we study the history of this clock, Hume, the more I am impressed with the fact that the eye is a most unreliable organ. We rarely see a thing as it actually is; we see it as we expect it to be. Take the magnifying-glass and look at those second and third pomegranates carefully."

"I see now," I cried. "They are not pomegranates; they are two rosettes."

"And there are two rosettes between two of the loops of the well in the garden. You grasp the importance of the discovery, I hope. It means that we have to study the photographs from quite a different point of view. All we have to do now is to find in the various backgrounds some significant mark that is paralleled in the various landmarks about Venice that lead to the casket."

"Are you not a little too sanguine, St. Hilary? These twelve marks are often most obscure. In the fifth and the eleventh hours there are no marks whatever."

"That is true," replied St. Hilary thoughtfully. "This discovery by itself is quite useless. If we could have found the mark of the fifth hour we could have begun at this fourth hour. But since that is missing——"

"And I suppose it is useless for us to think of beginning with the landmarks of the last hours, even if we could find them in the background. The last of the landmarks would be almost certainly found not in the open air, but in the interior of some palace."

"There is another difficulty that has just occurred to me," continued St. Hilary. "We have been taking it for granted that we start from the Pillar of San Marco in the Piazzetta. I still think that it is reasonable that the search begins there. If that be true, we find ourselves in the fourth hour at the Campo San Salvatore, but the landmark of the sixth hour brings us back to the balcony of San Marco in the Piazza again. In the next hour we simply stroll a few feet away to the Campanile. In that case the mad clockmaker has been leading us about in a senseless circle. He may have been mad, but he was not as mad as that."

"Then you think the wisest thing is for us to search for the second landmark? It does not seem particularly promising. So far as I can see, it is merely a curtain, with a conventional decoration of what appears to be more like two husks of corn than anything else I can think of. One of these husks is perpendicular; the other horizontal."

"I see no reason why we should not begin with the sixth hour," asserted St. Hilary.

"I think we may begin at any one of them with an equal chance of success," I said hopelessly. "This search of ours is like nothing so much as hunting for twelve needles in twenty thousand haystacks."

And it turned out that I was right. For several days we made no farther progress. We became so utterly fatigued and weary of looking for we knew not what that we saw nothing. We took to wandering vaguely about the canals and the streets. A restlessness urged us out at all hours in search of these vague landmarks. Every morning after breakfast we set out somewhere. Every evening we returned discouraged. And so a month passed, and we were no nearer to the da Sestos casket.

CHAPTER XVIII

JACQUELINE and I had not written to each other for nearly three weeks.

When I first returned from Bellagio I had intended to explain the apparent flippancy of my last words to her—that I could write the legend of the da Sestos clock, as well as search for the casket. For Jacqueline was, as I have said, quite ignorant that the casket and the clock were in any way connected.

But I had not done so. Partly because I wished to surprise her with that fact, and partly because success had not crowned our efforts as soon as I had hoped. I regretted that I had not told her everything; and yet each day I put off doing so. And so three weeks passed, and still I had not told her.

The fact is, this search for the casket had in some subtle way raised a barrier between Jacqueline and myself. At first I had entered into the quest with enthusiasm. Jacqueline's entreaty had given the task a dignity and a certain sacredness. But, gradually, my motive for finding it was lost sight of. The madness of St. Hilary

had also entered my veins. I became more and more eager for success purely for its own sake, and not for Jacqueline's. The quest had become almost a mania—just such a restless, haunting, cruel longing as tempts the miner to drag his aching feet one more burning mile for the gold he covets. That Jacqueline had asked me to find the casket for her redeemed the search from folly. But as soon as I cared for the thing itself it became a degrading passion.

It was Sunday morning. St. Hilary had insisted upon my going once more to the Academy of Arts to compare the photograph of the eighth hour with Carpaccio's picture, the Dismissal of the Ambassadors, in the series of paintings known as the Martyrdom of St. Ursula. I was still in search, of course, of the ever-baffling landmark.

The bell of the English church was solemnly tolling in the Campo San Agnese. The doors of the Academy were not yet open, and I began to watch listlessly the well-dressed throng of English and American tourists crossing the big iron bridge on their way to divine service. To my great surprise I saw Jacqueline among them.

There was a pensive look on her lovely face that touched me. I realized, now that I saw her, how great had been my folly. My eyes had been

bent on the mire, while the goddess herself was passing by. I sprang up the steps of the bridge, and met her half-way across.

"Jacqueline," I cried, "when did you come to Venice?"

She looked at me with a sort of gentle wonder. I put up my hand guiltily to my chin. St. Hilary and myself had grown so absorbed in our search that we had given little thought to what we ate or drank or what we wore or how we looked. But Jacqueline, it seemed, was observing my face and not my scrubby beard.

"We arrived last night. But you look a ghost, a shadow of yourself."

"The hunt for the casket, Jacqueline, is an excellent preventive against obesity," I said lightly.

At this reference to the casket the color slowly left her cheeks, and her eyes looked into mine wistfully.

"You—you are still searching for it?"

"Of course I am!" I answered almost gruffly.

"I did not know. You have not written," she said quietly.

"If I have not written," I answered, "it is because there was nothing to write about."

"Nothing to write about, Dick?" She smiled dreamily.

"Not worth mentioning, Jacqueline."

"Then you are still in the dark?"

"Absolutely."

"And—and you have little hope?"

"Almost no hope."

Absorbed though I was in my own selfish feeling, I could not but notice the disappointment of her tone. We were at the church door now. She held out her hand. To see her pass thus out of my sight, to know that my own obstinacy was raising this barrier between us, that I had wounded her—I could not let her go like that, even for a few hours.

"Jacqueline," I said firmly, "I wish to tell you about this search. I know a half street, half campo near here, delightfully shaded with mulberry-trees. There are benches, and one may sit there and talk quietly. Will you go with me? I will not keep you long."

"Well, Dick, what is it?" she asked when she was seated.

Her hands were clasped loosely in her lap. Her gaze passed me by, and dwelt on the cage of a thrush hanging on a nail in a doorway. The feathered prisoner was singing in ecstasy.

"This mad quest that you have sent me on," I broke out impetuously, "I want you to release me from it."

She was silent a moment, then drew herself up with a certain hauteur.

"I release you from it, of course, since you wish it," she answered with dignity.

"No, no, Jacqueline. Not in that way. Do not misunderstand me. I call it a mad quest not because it seems a hopeless one. It is mad, because it is useless. The most rigid sense of honor could not hold you to your lightly spoken word. You love the duke, or you do not. You love me, or you do not. Surely you do not pit us against each other. This is not a test of love. And so, I say, this quest is mad. It is leading me surely away from you. I am beginning to care for it for its own sake. I want you to release me from it."

"It is leading you from me?" she repeated wonderingly. "But you are doing this for me. Does not that keep me in your thoughts? You say this is not a test of love. Why should it not be? And if the lover is weary already of his task—if—" Her lip trembled.

"Dear Jacqueline, how can I make you understand? I ask you to release me from this search, not because I am tired, not merely because I think the casket can not be found. It is the principle of the thing. Supposing that the duke should bring you this casket, could that possibly

alter your feeling toward him? Could that make you love him more than you do at present?"

"Why should it not?" she answered, a little defiantly. "In a sense he has shown himself a truer lover than you. He is keeping up the search, cheerfully and patiently. And yet every day he finds time to write me of his failures and his successes. Apparently, I asked him to remove mountains. He attempts the impossible gladly, and sometimes I think he will accomplish it."

"The duke has been searching for the casket? Here, in Venice?"

"Yes, and without a moment's rest, so he assures me. More than that, he declares he is on its track—that he will bring it to me soon."

I was stupefied. Neither St. Hilary nor I had once seen the duke since he left my rooms. It seemed incredible that he should have been in Venice these past three weeks and that we should not know it.

"He will bring you the casket soon?" I repeated blankly. "And if he brings it to you, you are going to listen to him? Because I have said nothing, Jacqueline, have you thought me idle and indifferent? Do you trust him more than you trust me? If he has the luck to stumble on this casket, will that prove that he is more worthy

of your regard than I? Will you marry him for that?"

Jacqueline looked at me a moment in silence. She laid her hand gently on my arm.

"Has this quest troubled you so much? I begin to think it a very childish one. I begin to realize my folly, and yet——"

She rose from the bench, and shaking out her skirts daintily, opened her parasol.

"You are going, Jacqueline? There is no more to be said?"

"I told my aunt that I was going to church. I think I had better go. But afterward, if you will walk to the hotel with me, you may stay to luncheon, and in the afternoon you may take me out on the lagoon again. Then you shall tell me everything—just what you have done, and just what you have failed to do. And perhaps—perhaps, I may recall you from the task that you have undertaken for me."

"Jacqueline," I stammered with joy, "you mean—you mean that you may marry me without regard to this foolish promise of yours to the duke?"

"I mean," she answered slowly, "that I must know everything—everything. Then I may be better able to judge just what I ought to do, what I wish to do."

"I shall wait for you at the church door. I must first go to my rooms to make myself presentable. Heavens, Jacqueline, if you could know the relief I feel at abandoning this mad search. It has been a nightmare; but now we shall go out into the blessed sunshine again."

"But, Dick," she said wistfully, "you will need to plead very eloquently this afternoon to convince me that I may withdraw my word to Duke da Sestos. If only it had been possible to find that wretched casket! I shall look for you after church."

I watched her disappear within the doorway. In half an hour I had been to my rooms and returned. I slipped into a pew at the rear of the church. I wished to think—to dream. It seemed incredible that the search was ended. What would St. Hilary say when he knew that I had abandoned it? And, strange as it may seem, already I was vaguely sorry. Could I watch St. Hilary steadily going on with the search and be quite indifferent as to his success or failure? Should I never have regrets that I had not kept at it a little longer? Then I looked at Jacqueline, kneeling devoutly a few pews in front of me, and I smiled joyfully. No, with Jacqueline as my wife, I had no need of the excitement of a fool's errand.

Out of the stillness of my thoughts, as if from afar off, the text of the preacher fell on my ears, unheeding and yet strangely receptive. The text was twice repeated. It was sufficiently fantastic in itself, but to me it was the finger of fate.

It was pointing to the hiding-place of the da Sestos casket.

CHAPTER XIX

THIS was the text:

Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid the arms of it with fine gold.

The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind, and there were stays on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays.

At first, as I have said, the words fell quite idly on my ears. Then, without any effort on my part, a throne made of ivory, its arms overlaid with fine gold, seemed to flash before my eyes. I tried to resume the thread of my thought again, but the vision of the throne of ivory with the two lions at the side haunted my excited brain. All at once, with a shock of surprise, I knew why it stood before me with such startling distinctness. The throne of the automaton of the eighth hour was of ivory, its arms were of gold, it had six steps, and two lions crouched on either side.

At first I was merely astonished at the similarity of the throne of the Bible and the throne of the da Sestos clock. But other scenes of the hours sprang before my mind in review. I re-

membered the hour of St. Mark and the lion; the Council of Ten before the Gate; the Sultan and the kneeling slave. The scenes stopped abruptly there. In a flash, almost without thought, certainly without deliberate reasoning, I had fathomed the secret of the clock:

The scenes of the twelve hours were not Venetian scenes. They were Bible scenes disguised in an environment that was Venetian.

I could parallel each of the three hours that had occurred to me with familiar stories of the Bible. The scene of the first hour, the figure of St. Mark and the lion, as we had thought, was really Samson and the lion; the Sultan and the kneeling slave were David and the prostrate giant, Goliath. The Doge receiving the news of victory from the dove in the Campanile became Noah and the dove. But the other scenes—would they be equally clear?

I took the first scene that occurred to me, that in which the ten disks appear in succession, with the gate in the background. I took a Bible from the rack of the pew and opened it eagerly at the Book of Genesis. My knowledge of the Old Testament was not profound. I turned the leaves over quickly, scanning each page. I had to look simply for a passage in which a gate and ten men figured. I became unconscious of the reverent

worshipers about me. I was heedless even of good form. For half an hour I patiently turned page after page. I had reached the Book of Judges, and began to despair. Was this theory that promised so well to be discarded in its turn like a dozen others? No; I found the passage. It proved my theory to be a fact beyond peradventure. The passage was in the Book of Ruth:

Then went Boaz to the gate and sat him there, and behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spoke, came by, unto whom he said, Ho, such a one, turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. And they sat down.

Nothing could be more clear. The Doge became Boaz; the ten disks, representing, as we had thought, the Council of Ten, were the elders of the city.

I read the story of Samson and the lion. It was indisputably the scene of the first hour. The very words were a challenge—a clear statement in black and white—that he who should solve the riddle of the clock would have his reward. And he who failed should have his penalty to pay—the forfeiture of peace of mind and content—a bitter enough wage for failure:

And Samson said unto them, I will now put

forth a riddle unto you: If ye shall certainly solve it within seven days of the feast, and find it out, then will I give you thirty sheets and thirty changes of raiment.

But if ye solve it not within seven days, then shall ye give to me thirty sheets and thirty changes of raiment.

"I will put forth a riddle unto you!" And a brave riddle it had been. The mad goldsmith had taken these old Bible stories for his key—a key that he knew was as imperishable as time itself, and yet a key that would guard his secret well. To the Catholic of that day the Bible was a sealed book.

But if this were true—if these stories were indeed the key—was the riddle easier of solution? Would the Bible stories be more readily understood than the Venetian stories?

The theory of St. Hilary flashed across my mind. The cipher—that was the clue. In each of the scenes of the background a certain number had been mentioned. Thirty changes of raiment. Seven days. Six steps to the throne. Two lions. Thus was my second great discovery made.

Each scene from the Bible involved certain numbers.

I read the story of David and Goliath:

And there went a champion out of the camp of

the Philistines named Goliath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

There were the numbers again; six cubits and a span.

I could no longer doubt. And now, having wrested so much of the madman's secret, having surprised from him the key, I should, I felt confident, solve the rest. I was to cut the last thread that bound this secret to the grave.

Suddenly I became conscious of faces turned frowningly in my direction. In my excitement I had, I suppose, rustled the leaves. It was an unusual sight to see a man of discretion frantically turning over the leaves of his Bible during a sermon.

To sit through the sermon was impossible. I must get a breath of fresh air. I would wait for Jacqueline outside.

I walked to the quay of the Grand Canal. I scanned the sweep of the palaces, from the Salute to the Rialto Bridge. To which of them would these new clues lead?

I walked back to the church. The sermon was droning slumberously on. I wandered restlessly down the Calle San Rio. I found myself at the steamboat-landing. The little steamer was discharging its quota of passengers. I leaped aboard. My desire to look on the photographs

was intense. I wished to verify the other scenes. I wished to confound St. Hilary with my discovery.

Not until the steamer was half-way across the Giudecca did I remember, with a shock of dismay, my appointment with Jacqueline.

I persuaded myself that I had time to look at the photographs just once; I could hurriedly recount my wonderful discovery to St. Hilary; I could be rowed across to the Molo in three minutes, and be at the church in another ten. If I failed Jacqueline, she would forgive me when she knew the extraordinary circumstances under which I had deserted her. Had she not regretted, with a hint of reproach in her words that still rankled, that my search for the casket had been so fruitless of results? And had she not said that the duke was hunting for it without a moment's rest? Then there was no time to be lost.

I did fail Jacqueline. St. Hilary was not in my rooms, and I waited for him. The temptation to triumph over him proved too sweet. I was not the first man to risk his precious birthright of love for a mess of pottage.

CHAPTER XX

Two hours had passed since I left the church. St. Hilary and I had spent the time in a diligent study of the Bible. The result confirmed my theory beyond a doubt. With the exception of the scenes of the fifth and tenth hours, we had identified them all as Bible scenes. We had also found that in each story certain numbers were mentioned.

"To tell which are the significant numbers, that is the question," said St. Hilary. "In two or three of the stories, at least, more than one set are mentioned. How can we be sure which numbers count, and which do not?"

"We can not be sure, I suppose," I replied thoughtfully. "We can only guess. But at least we may make a reasonable guess. The goldsmith had some method in choosing them. What would be the most obvious?"

"That he should select the numbers that really counted in the various stories," replied St. Hilary.

"I have observed that the important numbers are invariably mentioned in the first part of the

story. We may go on that assumption to begin with, at any rate. Our search for the landmark of the second hour ought to begin from the Piazzetta, where the first landmark stands—that is, the lion of San Marco. Now our first numbers are 7, 30, 30. If we interpret those rightly, we shall find ourselves at the second landmark. Thence we may start for the third."

"But the meaning of those numbers," grumbled St. Hilary, "is extremely doubtful. They may be added to, or subtracted from, or divided or multiplied by others, and the landmark of the second hour is veiled in complete obscurity. If it were the landmark of the fourth hour, the House of the Camel, we should know what to look for."

"But it is not," I said impatiently. "Your precious landmark is quite useless by itself, because we have not been able to identify the Bible story of the fifth hour, and so we are ignorant of the numbers that will lead us to the landmark of the sixth. We are compelled to start at the first hour. From that point we go on to the second, and from the second to the third. As to the gap in the fifth hour, we won't attempt to jump that until we come to it."

The little man yawned. His dogged skepticism was maddening. The fact is, he resented my

having been so fortunate as to make the great discovery. Because he had not made it himself, or helped to make it, he sulked and made endless objections.

"How do you propose to interpret the first numbers, 7, 30, 30?" he asked.

"Well," I answered patiently, "say that they represent blocks of buildings. We go down the Grand Canal until seven blocks are passed. If we took the seventh canal to our left, and continued up that canal until thirty blocks had been passed——"

"We should find ourselves somewhere out in the lagoon," sneered St. Hilary.

"If we passed seven blocks on our right, then, proceeding up the seventh canal until thirty blocks were passed, took the junction of the two canals at this point for a new start until thirty more blocks were passed, where should we find ourselves?"

St. Hilary consulted the map of Venice that lay before him.

"You are a little obscure, my dear Hume. But, so far as I can make it out, after you had passed your sixty little canals, if you turned to the left you would find yourself in the Jewish quarter. If you turned to the right, in the fishermen's quarter. You may be sure that da Sestos

was not quite so mad as to hide his casket in a part of the city that would be subject to demolition. You will have to try again."

"Thirty changes of raiment and thirty sheets," I mused. "Thirty plus thirty; why not the sixtieth palace down the Grand Canal, either left or right?"

"Within seven days," quoted St. Hilary, closing his eyes.

"I had forgotten the seven days," I admitted. "Well, then, why not the fifty-third palace?"

"Why the fifty-third?" demanded St. Hilary in a bored tone.

"Within seven of sixty ought to mean fifty-three," I said quickly.

St. Hilary opened his eyes. A look of interest dawned in them. He drew toward him an old map of Venice, La Nuova Pianta di Venezia, it was called, and was published in 1689. It contained an interesting chart on which were marked all the palaces of Venice existing at that time. He began to count these palaces carefully, going down the Grand Canal toward the Rialto Bridge.

"The fifty-third palace is the Palazzo Chettechi. Look in that French monograph, Les Palais de Venise Moderne. See if it is mentioned there."

I turned hurriedly to the index.

"Yes, it is mentioned. But, confound it, the palace was torn down and rebuilt in 1805."

"And down with it tumbles your cunning little house of cards," commented the dealer cynically.

"After all, that solution was too obvious to be reasonable," I retorted cheerfully, though I felt the disappointment keenly. "But look here, St. Hilary"—I was consulting the Bible again—"there are four thirties mentioned. Perhaps the second couple of thirties has some significance. Does the fifty-third palace bring us to a corner of the Grand Canal, or should we find ourselves in the middle of the block?"

"We should find ourselves at the junction of the Grand Canal and the Rio di Lucca."

"Good! And if you counted sixty palaces up the Rio di Lucca, will that old chart tell the palace you would arrive at?"

"The Palazzo Giuliano."

"The Palazzo Giuliano might contain our landmark on its wall just as well as any other."

"It might," he cried, consulting the monograph on the palaces of modern Venice again, "only it happens that the façade of that palace was rebuilt in the eighteenth century. Again your lit-

tle house of cards crumbles about your ears, my dear Hume."

I stared down at the table. In what other way might I read a meaning into the numbers? I picked up an envelope and began to toy with it unconsciously. It was addressed to St. Hilary. It was literally covered with erasures and directions, and had followed him half around the world. But it had found him at last, though some of the directions were of the vaguest. We ought to be as clever as a postmaster. Aside from the extraneous aids of the directory, what methods would a postmaster use?

Mechanically I began to trace the ordinary and palpable clues to the destination of any letter. First of all, there is the state or country. That is as vague as the earth itself. But the state is narrowed down to the city in the state, and the city to the street——

"I believe I have found a solution that will hold water at last, St. Hilary!" I cried.

He blinked at me skeptically.

"Let us hear it by all means."

"Take the address on the envelope. It has suggested a possible solution to the numbers. First of all, there is the country. The country is narrowed down to the city of the country. Next comes the number of the street in the city. After

that the house in the street. In other words, the direction of an envelope is narrowed to more and more defined limits."

"An extremely accurate but not a startlingly original presentation of facts, dear boy. The connection between this envelope, for instance, and the da Sestos casket?"

"Call Venice the state; the city, the Grand Canal. Your street will then be the seventh canal; the number of the street will be the house of the landmark."

St. Hilary's dark eyes snapped. He was thoroughly interested at last. He drew toward him the map of Venice again. He pushed it away with an exclamation of disgust.

"Ingenious again, but not conclusive. The seventh canal flowing into the Grand Canal is a *cul-de-sac*. Its length is not a hundred yards, and it leads merely to the Campo San Stefano."

"You are mistaken," I said calmly. "You are counting the ditch that surrounds the Giardino Reale. The seventh canaletto is the Rio di Bocca. And the sixtieth palace from the junction of the Rio di Bocca and the Grand Canal will be the house of the landmark. What palace is that? Don't tell me that that is torn down."

"No, this one exists. It is called the Palazzo Fortunato. Come, it is time for us to do some-

thing more strenuous than talking. We will test your theory, and I think it a fairly reasonable one at last. But first of all, a bite at Florian's. It is three o'clock. We may get no dinner."

I had unconsciously taken the lead since my great discovery. Now I hesitated. Though I had broken my tryst with Jacqueline, I had intended seeing her this afternoon before we actually began our search. But I could not let St. Hilary begin his explorations without me. A few hours sooner or later, I persuaded myself, would not make much difference.

I know now how specious were my arguments. A woman's love is not to be treated lightly. It is the most sacred and precious thing in the world, and she knows that it is. It does not come and go at one's beck and call. It burns brightly so long as the flame is fed; to quench that flame is dangerous, and it is not always easy to revive it.

"I am quite ready to go with you," I said soberly. "My gondolier is waiting below. We will let him take us to the Molo and then dismiss him. We want no witnesses or possible spies."

"Excellent," he murmured. "And bring along your Bible; that must be our chart and compass in our voyage of discovery."

CHAPTER XXI

Venetian Marco Polo himself, wide-eyed and eager, toiling across burning wastes to the Great Khan of far-off Cathay, was not more imbued with the very spirit of adventure than were St. Hilary and I that April afternoon, as we set forth on our little voyage of discovery in a prosaic gondola.

We had lunched at the Grundewald. We rose with a certain deliberation, and walked toward the Molo. The band was thundering out a Strauss waltz. The Piazza was filled with its usual laughing, chattering crowd, eating and drinking at the hundreds of round little tables that overflowed a quarter of the square.

I could not help thinking what a sensation I should cause if the great throng was suddenly to be stilled, while from the balcony up there by the four bronze horses I cried aloud for all the square to hear that we two adventurers of the twentieth century were about to lay bare one of the mysteries of Venice—that we were to bring forth to the light of day a marvelous treasure

that had been hid for nearly half a thousand years. How they would howl me into a shamed silence with their jeers and laughter! And supposing that I could tell them the very hiding-place, would one of all those hundreds, even the poorest, take the trouble to go and see? Would the hunchbacked bootblack in the Arcade there, gnarled and twisted with the cold of winter and the heat of summer? Would the Jewish shopkeepers, the antiquarian in the library, the tourists, who had come three thousand miles to feast their eyes on wonders? Not the most visionary would stir in his seat. Only St. Hilary and I, it appeared, in the whole world were absolute fools this afternoon.

"*E dove?*" demanded the gondolier, after we had taken our seats.

"*Canalazzo,*" I cried, "*e presto, molto, molto presto.*"

"*Si, si, signore,*" he cried with enthusiasm, scenting a generous tip.

The sun, just dipping behind the dome of the Salute, blazed fiercely, but the awning of our gondola was thrown back. Swiftly we swept down the sun-kissed stream, cleaving the lake of gold. The great palaces on either side, ablaze with riotous color, seemed as unreal as a painted picture. What had we to do with this mysteri-

ous Venice, this enchantress of the seas, holding herself aloof in melancholy disdain? Like curious savages, we were to prowl in her very holy of holies. We were to despoil her of her last glorious treasure, that she had guarded so jealously these hundreds of years.

The fantasy burst as a bubble in thin air. Behind us raced a boatful of trippers, the two oarsmen exerting every effort to urge on their craft to the railway station. There were the English *père de famille;* the comfortable mamma with a chick on either side. And about them were piled high bandboxes and shawls, portmanteaus and carryalls. It was the twentieth century after all. It was quite fitting that we should be seeking to reap where we had not sown.

We passed the Grand Hotel. Mrs. Gordon, Jacqueline, and the duke were seated on the balcony. I raised my hat mechanically. The duke returned the greeting with a flourish. Mrs. Gordon was suddenly interested in the customs-house opposite. Jacqueline smiled, but her greeting would have been as cordial to the concièrge of her hotel. My face burned. I wished to tell St. Hilary to continue the search without me, and yet I hesitated. Even now, one nod to the gondolier and I could be landed at the steps; but I

hesitated, and in five seconds we had passed. Before I had wholly recovered my presence of mind we were at the Rio di Bocca.

Our gondolier uttered his weird cry of warning. The gondola turned the corner sharply. We were in cool depths. The smell of damp mortar, that indefinable moist smell of the *canaletti* of Venice smote our nostrils. We skirted an old wall, bulging outward with decrepitude; a narrow quay, bathed in sunlight; the barred windows of a palace, blackness and gloom within. A barge of bricks was poled slowly past us, then a funeral catafalque. A hotel omnibus just escaped collision. I saw it all, but I saw it all unheeding. Three years of selfish ease and irresponsibility had left me incapable of quick decision at this critical moment. And now another opportunity to become reconciled to Jacqueline had passed. I had raised one more barrier between us.

St. Hilary shouted sharply to the gondolier. We came to a sudden stop.

We were at the sixtieth palace, and its façade was as bare as the sheet of an unsigned hotel register.

"So again we have come on a fool's errand," he groaned.

The gondolier leaned forward and touched my

sleeve. He had observed our perplexity. He pointed to a palace we had just passed.

"Ecco, Signori, the House of the Angel! It is not this one. It is the third back."

"The third back?" I repeated mechanically. I let my glance follow his outstretched finger. With a twist of the oar he had turned the gondola again toward the Grand Canal.

"Behold, Signore, the House of the Angel. Up there, in the niche over the door."

I raised my eyes dully. I had no idea what the man was talking about. The palace at whose steps we had halted was a magnificent structure of the fourteenth century, so beautiful that in any other city than Venice it would have been worth a pilgrimage to see. Over the doorway was a triangular niche, a kind of shrine. A half figure of an angel was carved in the niche, and a kneeling child looked quaintly up into the angel's face. The gondolier pointed to the shrine reverently.

"The angel is to drive away the evil spirits, Signore. The evil spirit of a pig once dwelt in this beautiful palace. I assure the Signore that I am telling him the truth, though there are many hundreds of years since the evil soul of the pig was conjured away by the angel and the little child. The house is now sweet and clean of all

evil, and is called the House of the Angel. But look, Signore, you can see the unclean pigs that were carved in the wall by the wicked builder. Before they were broken, the house was called the House of the Pigs."

We looked upward.

The house had a frieze made of a capriciously carved array of pigs. The posture of each two of the creatures was the same: the one recumbent, the other erect. The heads and the feet and most of the bodies had been stricken off.

"It is very simple," cried St. Hilary exultingly. "Our husks of corn have simply become the bodies of pigs. We have found the second landmark."

He held the photograph of the background of the second hour before me. That background, it will be remembered, was a hanging, and on this hanging a decorative scheme that we had supposed to be husks of corn.

I forgot my folly in passing Jacqueline, and her cold greeting. Here was proof indisputable that we were really on the track of the casket at last.

"But why," queried St. Hilary, knitting his forehead in perplexity, "should it be the fifty-seventh palace, and not the sixtieth?"

I opened the Bible, and again read the story.

I saw our mistake immediately. In our haste to test this new theory of mine we had not read the narrative with sufficient care.

"There is another verse that we have omitted to read. It follows immediately after." I read it aloud:

And within three days they could not declare the riddle.

"You observe the expression 'within.' That is to say, we were not to look for the sixtieth palace, but for the fifty-seventh, or the third within sixty."

"Ah, that is quite clear," cried St. Hilary with a sigh of relief. "And now for the next landmark. Read your passage of the second hour again."

And there went forth a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

"Six cubits and a span," he mused. "What the deuce are the six cubits and a span?"

"Let us look around." I motioned to the gondolier to rest on his oars.

We drifted slowly past the House of the Angel. The next house was a warehouse—an ugly four-story building, set some five paces back. The upper stories projected over the lowest story, and were supported by pillars.

"There are six of those pillars, and there is a door. Can that be your cubits and a span?"

I shook my head. "Those pillars are of wood. This warehouse could not have been built when the goldsmith made his casket."

"True; and it would be a senseless proceeding to lead us past the fifty-seventh palace, only to land us at the fifty-eighth."

"But look, St. Hilary, we have been so close to the forest that we have failed to see the trees. Do you observe those circular windows just over our heads? There are just six of them. As for the span, isn't a span half a cubit? The top of that squat door let into the wall there is semi-circular in shape; the semi-circle, the exact counterpart of the upper part of the windows. Nothing could be more clear."

"My only fear is that it is too clear to be true," he said anxiously.

"We shall soon determine that."

I stood upright on the seat of the gondola, and, reaching forward, pulled a rusty bell that hung beside the low door. Our gondola, at a sign from me, had been rowed up stream once more.

In response to my vigorous summons a servant appeared at the main door of the House of the Angel.

"What may the Signori desire?" he inquired.

"We are architects," lied St. Hilary glibly. "We are very desirous to see your garden. We understand that it is a very curious old garden."

The servant in the shabby livery shook his head.

"The Signori Inglesi are mistaken," he answered politely. "The interesting garden belongs to the House of the Camel just behind this palazzina. Our garden has only artichokes and asparagus and beans and things."

"The House of the Camel!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

St. Hilary pinched my arm for silence. "But there is a passage through your garden that leads to the garden of the other house, is there not?"

He jingled insinuatingly some loose coins in his pocket.

"Ah, yes, Signore, that is true. A long, long time ago, a great nobleman dwelt in this house, and his daughter lived in the house behind. He had a gate made in the wall that divides the two gardens. The gate is still there."

"Excellent! And you will lead us into the garden of the House of the Camel by that gate?"

Without further parley, St. Hilary leaped lightly ashore. I followed his example, and tossed our fare to the gondolier.

"Thoughtful of you to send off that chap. We can't be too careful," remarked St. Hilary as we followed the servant in the shabby livery into the hall.

This hall, as in all Venetian palaces, ran through the house from front to rear. At its end was a glass door. The door unlocked, we were in the garden. A path turned to the right, joining a broad walk fringed with a well-trimmed hedge of box. This walk led straight to the gate —our gate of the third hour. There was no need to refer to the photograph. It was unmistakable.

"The Signori are of course expected?" asked the servant hesitatingly, as he unlocked this gate.

"Naturally," replied St. Hilary, dropping a piece of silver in his palm.

The gate was locked behind us.

"How are we to find our way out?" I demanded.

St. Hilary was staring about him as one who knows his ground.

"My dear Hume," he grinned, "I know my way out perfectly. Allow me to point out to you the Well of the Pomegranates and the Loops, and immediately over the doorway there the Sign of the Blind Camel. We are at the landmark of the fourth hour."

"And the ten figures on the disks of the third

hour are represented by these busts built in the wall—five in either wall. We are getting on. But why, I wonder, did da Sestos lead us to this landmark by the way of the House of the Angel? He might have brought us here directly by the Campo San Salvatore."

"Because," commented St. Hilary, "the way by land would have necessitated a dozen directions. By water we have come without undue perplexity in three. But here, I am afraid, our voyage of discovery must end for to-night. We shall have to puzzle out the fifth hour before we can go farther."

I had opened the Bible that I had brought with me from the gondola, and, supported by the curb of the well, I rested it on my knee, turning to the Book of Genesis. I read the verse of the fourth hour:

And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking at the well, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels' weight of gold.

"This is obscure enough," I said ruefully. "This jargon of a golden earring and of half a shekel weight and two bracelets of ten shekels' weight will take some time to reason out, especially as we have no idea what to look for."

"And I think," St. Hilary remarked, "we are

to be interrupted. Here comes one of the priests of the seminary to see what business we have in his garden."

"Gentlemen," asked the padre politely, as we bowed with an assurance that belied my feelings at least, "you are looking for some one? I saw you admitted a moment ago by the gate yonder."

"Yes," boldly lied St. Hilary once more. "We were about to ring your bell. We went to the House of the Angel by mistake. We are architects, and we have heard that you have a wonderful old dial. We are making a study of the curious dials of Venice. Would you show us yours?"

St. Hilary's question was not so idle as might appear. He was ignoring the existence of the fifth landmark, and was asking for the sixth landmark, which we had identified in this way. The Venetian scene of the sixth hour, it will be remembered, was that of the Doge and the poet Petrarch seated in the balcony of San Marco, overlooking the Piazza, and watching the festivities below, symbolized by the dancing automaton figure, that advanced ten steps to the front and ten to the rear. The parallel story in the Bible we had found by a rather roundabout process. Some days before I had accidentally made the discovery that the face of the

Doge bore a remarkable resemblance to the prophet Isaiah as depicted in one of the mosaics of San Marco. Naturally, then, when we hunted up the Biblical stories of the hour, after my return from church, we looked for a story in which the prophet Isaiah figured as one of the characters. The concordance at the back of my Oxford Bible referred us to the story of the Jewish King Hezekiah, who, sick unto death, went to the prophet Isaiah for a sign that he should recover his strength. And this was the verse:

And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign? And Isaiah said, Shall the shadow of the dial go back ten degrees or shall the shadow go forward?

The little automaton figure advancing and retreating ten steps symbolized plainly the going forward and backward of the shadow. This was significant in itself, and might have made us tolerably sure that a dial was to be the landmark. But when, in the light of this story, we looked carefully at the railing of the balcony as photographed in our snap-shot, we noticed at once that the ironwork of the railing was of intertwined circles, intersected by diameters drawn through each of their centers. The circles, then, stood for the dial; the diameter, for the needle of the

dial. We might be reasonably certain that our search would be narrowed to more and more defined limits. Even without the landmark of the fifth hour, by which we should be able to discover the locality of the dial for ourselves (provided always that we could interpret the numbers aright), it was not an extravagant hope of St. Hilary's that the padre might direct us to the landmark of the sixth hour. I waited breathlessly for his answer. Let the gods be propitious; let fortune smile!

The gaunt but handsome face of the young priest was lighted up with a charming smile.

"But it will be an honor," he said, "to show our curious dial to the American gentlemen."

"English, pardon me," corrected St. Hilary readily, and he pinched my arm. "We leave Venice for London in an hour or so. This is the last and most curious dial we expect to see."

What a polished and delightful liar the dealer in antiquities was! But a cautious one withal. For aught we knew, we might be prowling about these premises with a jimmy and dark lantern before many more moons, and it might be convenient to prove an alibi.

I had expected the priest to lead us to an obscure corner of the garden. To my surprise and disappointment he took us directly to the

house. Of what use could a dial be under a roof? The good fathers of the seminary had taken it from the garden, in all likelihood, and placed it within doors as an interesting curiosity for their pupils to gape at.

"Perhaps you know, gentlemen," said the priest, as he led the way up a broad and dreary stairway, devoid of ornament, but scrupulously clean, "that this was once the house of the Venetian astrologer, Jacopo Bembo. Here, some two hundred years ago, came the flower of the Venetian aristocracy. They came to consult him—one for a love philter; another for a talisman against the plague; another, perhaps, for a deadly potion to still the beating of a rival's heart. Some strange and dark scenes, I suspect, have taken place in the laboratory of Messer Bembo. And this is it."

We had ascended to the third story. He threw open the door of a large room. There were some maps on the wall, desks, and chairs. It was evidently used now as a school-room.

"But the dial?" I cried impatiently.

"Oh, the dial is on the roof. Have you ever heard of a dial being in so strange a place before?"

"It is precisely that," I cried joyously, "that makes it so unique in interest for us."

"And this dial on the roof will make our collection of curious dials quite complete," added St. Hilary gravely.

We walked a few steps down the echoing landing. The worthy padre opened a door. A narrow wooden stairway led to the roof.

"If you will pardon me, I will precede you, gentlemen. There is a trapdoor at the top."

"And did the great astrologer Bembo have to climb out of that hole whenever he wished to consult the hour of day?" I asked jocosely.

"You will see," answered the priest smiling.

When first we stepped out on the roof, the glitter of the fierce sun on the leads blinded us. We looked in vain for the dial. The priest walked to the parapet where a stone bench stood and pointed to a large circle cut deep in the leads at the foot of the bench.

"Ecco, Signori, your curious dial, and the Signs of the Zodiac also. The needle of the dial is not the truly original one. That was broken long ago. But the one we have replaced it with is precisely similar to the antique."

St. Hilary and I sank on our knees to observe it the more closely and to whisper to each other without the good father overhearing us. The dealer traced a line tremblingly with his forefinger.

"Here," he whispered, "is where the shadow falls at twelve o'clock. Ten degrees before that, it must point in this direction."

He squinted along the imaginary line. It led him over the parapet, and in either direction it directed us to nothing more definite than the blue sky.

"But at ten degrees after twelve," I whispered hoarsely, "it points with absolute directness to that square tower, the tower of Noah and his dove, depend upon it. We have found the seventh landmark."

We stood upright and brushed the dust from our knees. St. Hilary produced a note-book, and began to scribble notes and to sketch the dial with every show of professional interest.

"Yes, it is a great curiosity, this dial," purred the priest with satisfaction. "Here, in the cool of summer nights, when the sirocco has been blowing all day, I often come to sit and ponder the issues of life and death, as, no doubt, the old astrologer did before me."

"You have a splendid view," I remarked carelessly. "What is that square tower over there? It appears to be the tower of a palace."

"Yes, signore, it is the tower of the Palazzo Cæsarini. If you are architects, you ought to see that palace. It is full of interest."

"The Cæsarini Palace, you said, I think?" inquired St. Hilary, still scribbling.

"Exactly, and it is known popularly as the Palazzo degli Scrigni."

"The Palace of the Iron Safes!" I cried, startled.

"The signori Inglesi must understand that, very long ago, when the house of the Cæsarini was the most powerful in Venice, as it still is one of the richest, the Prince Cæsarini had two great iron safes built in the walls of his cellars to keep his treasure in. These safes were contrived by a certain goldsmith called da Sestos. Yes, the palace is worth seeing. But do not attempt to see it until after Wednesday, because a grand *bal masqué* is to be given on that evening, and they are busy making great preparations."

"Ah, yes, we must have a look at it some time," said St. Hilary carelessly. "A thousand thanks for your courtesy, father. *Buona sera.*"

"*Buona sera, signori.*"

CHAPTER XXII

A CLOCK in the church of San Salvatore was striking the hour of seven as St. Hilary and I, after bidding good night to our friendly priest, crossed the Campo. Our search for that night was ended. I was free to see Jacqueline at last. Promising to call for my friend early the next morning, I hastened to the Grand Hotel.

It had been a wonderful day. After weeks of futile wandering, we were going straight to the goal. But Jacqueline? Would she forgive me for breaking my appointment, even though I was at last to bring her the casket? I had well-nigh drawn from her the gentle confession of her love. She had left the gate of Paradise ajar. She had looked at me in such a way that the very look was an invitation to enter when I should reappear. And I had failed her.

It was in vain that I tried to reassure myself. If I had not kept that sacred tryst, was it not because in failing to do so I was really serving her? When once she knew the circumstances she

must forgive me. She had asked me to find the casket for her. She had dreaded the possibility of the duke's finding it. Could she find fault, then, because I had taken her at her word?

But because she had asked me to find it, I should have gone to her at once to tell her that the forlorn hope had become an actual possibility. Instead of doing that, I had thought of myself first—of my own petty triumph. I had yielded to the cheap excitement of putting my theory to actual test. I had seen her in the duke's company on the balcony of the hotel only a few hours ago. What if she had turned to him for the sympathy and confidence that I had failed to give her? Could I complain if she had done that? Only a few hours ago I had insisted upon the uselessness of the search. I had begged her to bid me relinquish it. I had told her that she had no right to rest her happiness on the shifting foundations of chance; that if she loved the duke, there was nothing more to be said; but that, if she loved me, she had no right to permit him to misconstrue her idly spoken words. Let her cut the Gordian knot by yielding herself to me.

I had said all this to her, and my actions this afternoon had belied my words. Could I explain away this apparently glaring inconsistency? I

should find it difficult to prove to her that I was the loyal lover I had claimed to be. I hardly dared hope that she would listen and forgive.

I was prepared for reproaches, for tears. It was not unlikely, I thought, that she would even refuse to see me. But she came into the reception-room of the hotel almost immediately after my arrival, and she was smiling.

"Jacqueline!" I held her hand clasped in mine. I pleaded for forgiveness with my eyes.

She withdrew her hand gently—not with impatience, or embarrassment either, but quite naturally, with a frank smile that was altogether friendly and affectionate.

"What do you think of me, Jacqueline? That I should have failed you?" I murmured.

"I must suspend judgment until you tell me precisely why you have failed me," she cried cheerfully.

I took heart. I plunged into my story. I did not make light of my offence. I did not exaggerate it. I told her the truth, but I spared her details. I was too eager to hear her say that she forgave me to bother now with long and elaborate explanations. I told her that I had come across unexpected clues that had led me so far unerringly toward the hiding-place of the casket. The existence of these new clues had

occurred to me, very strangely, in church while I was waiting for her. Just how they had dawned on me, how I had traced them out, I would tell her later. For the present, it was enough that I had found them. I had not met her after the church service because I had yielded to the temptation of putting them to the test. This latter task had taken me all the afternoon. I reminded her that she had urged the great importance of haste in accomplishing this task. Every moment was valuable, if I was to anticipate the duke. Because I had taken her precisely at her word, surely she would not find fault with that? Surely her strong commonsense must help her to understand, even though I had caused her some annoyance, perhaps vexation.

This was my plea. But even as I made it I felt its weakness. The fact remained that I must have wounded her. The fact remained that love is not logic. It is a thing so fragile that, like a sensitive plant exposed to the cold blast, it withers if not guarded tenderly. It withers none the less surely because one's carelessness may not be deliberate. And I knew that my carelessness in a way had been deliberate. My vehement protestations did not ring true.

She heard me through without speaking. At

the end of my story she sighed, and I fancied that for the first time her cheerfulness gave way to pain.

"You forgive me?" I asked humbly.

"Yes," she answered slowly. "If you can say quite honestly that you feel that there is nothing for me to forgive, I forgive you."

I was silent.

"It would be unreasonable that I should blame you for doing only too well what I had asked you to do," she said gently.

"Only too well, Jacqueline?" I repeated anxiously.

"A year ago, Dick, I was at a luncheon given by one of my friends to announce her engagement. There were twelve of us present. The talk at the table drifted to a play that most of us had seen. It was a mediæval play, the hero a knight, who had had a task given him—a difficult, seemingly an impossible task, by the woman whom he professed to love. Some one asked what the man of the twentieth century would do if such a task were given him by the woman he loved. Would he obediently attempt it? Or would he ridicule it? It was a question of character, you see."

The discussion seemed to me rather silly, but I nodded gravely.

"And some one suggested," continued Jacqueline dreamily, "that it would be interesting for one to apply this test. It would be a test of love. If the man really cared, he would undertake even the impossible.

"So you applied this interesting test to me?" I exclaimed.

"When, some weeks ago," she went on, "you told me that you loved me, I could not help remembering that conversation at the luncheon. You did not put yourself in the most favorable light. You confessed that you had been living only to please yourself. You acknowledged that you had no ambition, and no energy to fulfil an ambition."

"That I *had* no ambition before I met you, Jacqueline," I interrupted.

"To apply such a test to you would be childish, I thought then. But I did suggest that you should do something. In the meantime," she added very slowly, her chin resting on her clasped hands, "Duke da Sestos came into my life. He, too, professed to love me."

"I see. You saw in him the manly traits you found lacking in me. He was ambitious; I was not. He was bold and confident, while I was only too conscious that I had made rather a muddle of my life so far. I can imagine that

the contrast between us was not favorable to me."

She looked at me pleadingly.

"Do not make it too hard for me, Dick. The duke interested me, I confess it. I liked him. Perhaps I even admired him. Every day I saw something of him. He was untiring in his devotion. I began to wonder, at last, if he did not really love me."

"Had you never been sure that I really loved you, Jacqueline?" I asked sadly.

"No; not sure," she answered steadily. "How could I be? You neglected me. You went to Rome without excuse. You did not even write to me. And then the duke asked me to be his wife, and this in spite of every discouragement I could throw in his path. For if I admired him, I was careful not to show him that."

She drew herself up proudly, and looked at me with a calm dignity.

"You know how, quite involuntarily, I asked him to do what seemed an impossible thing. If he would bring me the casket that belonged to the chest he had given to me, I would listen to his declaration of love, and not until then. Too late I realized that he had taken my words to be a test of his devotion. I was terrified at the encouragement I had unconsciously given him.

I had not dreamed that he would take the challenge seriously. And yet I wondered at his earnestness. Any woman would be touched at such faith and courage. Here actually was a man who dared to undertake the impossible! Then I thought of you."

"Would I do as much? Is that what you mean?"

"I asked myself naturally that. And it seemed fair—I wished you to know what I had said to the duke. I wished you to, because——"

"You wished to apply a similar test to me," I prompted.

"And so," continued Jacqueline, very pale, "I threw the whole issue into the hands of fate. I sent for you. I told you that you must also try to find this casket for me. And how did you receive this request? So lightly that the last words you said were these: 'Perhaps I shall find time to write the legend of the clock as well as to find the casket.' You failed to realize that the finding of this casket was a real crisis in my life and in yours. You wrote twice, and only the shortest and most unsatisfactory of notes. Not unsatisfactory because you were unsuccessful, but because you were pursuing the search in so negligent a manner. And when, at last, I saw you this morning, you met me with re-

proaches. You were weary of the search. It was actually degrading you. It was leading you from me."

She paused, and looked at me imploringly. I was silent.

"You urged me to release you from it. But you wished me to understand that it was only reasonable to do so. I was willing to listen. I wished to understand that so much myself. I was ready to believe it—oh, so glad to believe it. I waited for you eagerly. You failed to wait for me. What was I to think? I do not reproach you for doing too well what I had asked you to do. But, Dick, if you could have done it in a different manner!"

"In a different manner?" I repeated obstinately, though I understood only too well what she meant. "What does the manner signify, so long as the thing is being done, and being done successfully?"

"It signifies to me, Dick," she insisted gently. "Right or wrong, I have the right to put on the facts just the interpretation that seems to me fair." She turned to me with sudden passion. "Supposing I *was* foolish, even heartless, in imposing this test, reckless and foolish in putting my happiness in the hands of fate, yet if it ennobled the one, and degraded, by his own con-

fession, the other, why should I not let the results plead for themselves? Why should I not abide by the decision of fate? You have driven me, you see, in spite of myself, to this question."

"Oh, if it has ennobled the duke!" I could not help saying.

"Yes, ennobled," she answered defiantly, "if constant love is ennobling. Don't, please, sneer at that. I fought against him. I could not help feeling a prejudice against him, perhaps because he was a foreigner. If he interested me, it was in spite of myself. He had every barrier to break down. And, I repeat, we women are not indifferent to a man who sets to work patiently and courageously to break down these barriers —or, at least, to attempt to break them down. Every day, almost every hour, I have been reminded that he cared for me. A hundred little thoughtfulnesses and kindnesses that could not but appeal to a woman he has unceasingly shown me. While you, Dick, while you——"

There were tears in her eyes. Unconsciously she stretched out her hands to me. If I had not been blind—if I had only taken those dear hands and drawn her to me—I might have been spared hours of pain. I might have conquered then. But I was hurt, indignant, proud. She had not

judged me fairly. I forgot that I had not given her the opportunity to do that.

"And I?" I said quietly, "I have been doing what you asked me to do, perhaps not in the most approved way, not so tactfully as Duke da Sestos has conducted his discreet search, doubtless; though how he can have been looking for the casket here in Venice, while he has found time to play the lover in Bellagio, I fail to see."

We arose. Jacqueline looked at me indignantly.

"You are unjust," she cried proudly, "and you are quite mistaken. For not only has Duke da Sestos found time to show me that he loves me, but this afternoon he brought to me the casket that belonged to the steel chest."

"He has found the da Sestos casket? Impossible! It is impossible," I stammered.

"It stands on the table there," she said with quiet dignity.

I walked unsteadily to the table she indicated, and I saw the casket.

It was an exquisite thing, a jewel-case worthy of holding a prince's diadem. It was about as long as my two hands interlocked, and a little broader than the palm of my hand. Two medallions were in each of the front and rear panels, and a medallion at either end. The design of

the medallions was the loves of the gods in silver-gilt, *repoussé*. The cover rose to an apex, and on the apex was a nymph embraced by a satyr. The material was ebony, thickly inlaid with silver of a quaint design. I lifted the cover. There were several layers of little drawers. But I saw no sign of the springs. I saw no compartments that held the more precious of the Doge's jewels. As I looked at it more carefully, I saw that the workmanship was not Venetian, but French. In no way did it answer to the description of the casket in the Diary of Sanudo.

I understood. The duke had despaired of finding the casket. It was so much simpler to pretend that he had found it. Jacqueline would believe that this was the casket as readily as if he had brought the real one. Even if she had any doubts, how could she prove them? He was a clever rascal, my lord duke. Unfortunately for the success of his ruse, he had not counted on my intervention, or perhaps he despised me too much to care.

Jacqueline watched me with parted lips, a slight frown of anxiety on her forehead. Her eyes seemed to plead with me. What did she wish me to say? To tell her that the duke was a liar and a cheat? Or did she wish me to say

that this was indeed the casket? Would she be glad to hear that? Had he conquered her so surely?

"It is very beautiful," I said indifferently.

"You are convinced?" she asked, almost timidly.

"It is worthy of any museum in Europe."

"You think it is really the casket?" she persisted.

"I imagined that there would be gems in the da Sestos casket," I said, smiling at her.

"You are not answering my question."

"Will you tell me how the duke happened to find this—this pretty toy? Did he honor you with so much information?"

"He brought it to me only this afternoon. I was so—so overwhelmed—I should say, astonished—that I could say nothing. Presently, I suppose, he will tell me."

"And now that he has brought it, Jacqueline?"

"If this is the da Sestos casket, I must keep my word."

"Then I do assure you that it is not. Do you hear me, Jacqueline? I swear to you that this is not the da Sestos casket. I will prove to you that this Duke da Sestos is the liar and cheat that I have long suspected him to be."

She looked at me without speaking, but her face was suddenly transfigured. My courage came back by leaps and bounds. I felt instinctively that the day was not yet lost.

"And how will the ingenious Mr. Hume accomplish that delightful task?" demanded a cold voice. The duke walked in.

"How shall I do that, Duke da Sestos?" I repeated passionately. "I shall do that by bringing to Miss Quintard the real da Sestos casket before the week is over."

"You are promising a great deal, my friend," he sneered.

For the second time since we had met on the Piazza we looked steadily at each other. It was to be the last grapple now.

"Will you wait that week, Jacqueline, before you listen to Duke da Sestos?" I pleaded.

The duke made a gesture of entreaty. "Miss Quintard can not do that without showing that she doubts my word."

Jacqueline looked slowly from me to the duke, and then again at me. She smiled—that same grave smile that had puzzled me so much the last half hour.

"I shall wait that week," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THAT night I could not sleep; and, indeed, I had enough to think about as I lay in my troubled bed.

Now I remembered with joy that strange smile of Jacqueline's, a smile as vague and inscrutable as the immortal smile on the lips of the divine Gioconda, that withholds so much. My dear Jacqueline had promised that she would not pledge herself to the duke for a week. That assurance was infinitely heartening. But I had made my promise before the duke, and so it was but a foolish boast after all. If he had been villain enough to attempt to impose upon her in this way, he was quite capable of setting spies at my heels who would dog my every movement for the next eventful few days. That would make my promise more difficult of achievement. However, the words were spoken. There was nothing for it now but to bend every effort to find the casket. I must make good my word at all costs.

If the casket were actually in existence, and in Venice, I would do that, be the difficulties what they might. The foppish mantle of the

dilettante had slipped off my willing shoulders. I was aroused at last. We should see now who was the better man—this Latin with feline, sheathed claws, or the Anglo-Saxon with bull-dog grip.

When I knew that sleep was quite impossible, I put on my dressing-gown and went into the sitting-room to read. But it was impossible for me to keep my attention on the book. I threw open the heavy shutters and looked out.

The lights of Venice the mysterious glowed dimly in the distance. The newly risen moon shone on campanile, dome and spire. Here and there a gondola, a black speck in a lake of silver, drifted slowly by. I heard the plash of the oars, the fragment of a song. Then my attention was drawn to the fondamenta immediately beneath my window by the sharp, persistent bark of a dog.

A white poodle was leaping in an ecstasy of joy at its master, who was doing his utmost to quiet the beast. He cursed the dog volubly by the evil spirits of his father and grandfather and all his numerous relations and ancestors. At first this little scene only amused me, but my idle amusement gave way to an eager interest when presently I heard my name mentioned. Leaning far out, I saw that Pietro, my gondo-

lier, was conversing with the dog's master. I tried in vain to hear what they were talking about, but almost immediately the dog and his master slunk down the quay, hugging the shadow of the wall. I had not seen the fellow's face, but something in his gait seemed familiar. I whistled to attract Pietro's attention, and beckoned to him. Before he had entered my room I had made up my mind that I knew who this prowler was. I was convinced that it was none other than the duke's servant, whom St. Hilary and I had seen that night the duke had paid his memorable visit to my rooms.

"Pietro," I said, looking at him steadily, "I have had you in my service ever since you left the penitentiary a few rods down the quay. It was an affair of stabbing, I believe."

Pietro nodded with unblushing countenance.

"Yes, monsignore, it was an affair of stabbing. But that I was innocent as a three-years-old babe, I swear to you by all the holy saints in the calendar, including the Blessed Virgin herself."

"Pietro," I continued, "I have been a fairly good master. You have earned many a *buona lira*." I paused suggestively.

He was voluble in his gratitude. Heaven was witness that he had been faithful and honest.

"Then will you tell me who was talking to you a few minutes ago? Will you tell me exactly what he said to you?"

Certainly he would, and with an ease born of years of careful cultivation he lied as cheerfully and fluently as St. Hilary himself.

"The man, monsignore, is the cousin of the husband of my sister. He is the concierge of the Pallazzina Baroni on the Rio Santa Barbara. Perhaps you have seen, monsignore, the wonderful poodle that is the property of the Principessa Fini, who lives in that palace. I assure you, monsignore, that the Principessa adores the poodle with the woolly coat that hangs in strings at the tail with a devotion that is as great as if the wonderful poodle were her own son. But this poodle, you must understand, is of an intelligence that is marvelous and a badness that is lamentable. He is always running away from his dear mistress. To-night he went for a ride on the steamboat—oh, he is of an intelligence that is truly remarkable, and came to our fondamenta to visit another dog, but a dog of so plebeian a birth as to be disgraceful. And so the concierge has come swearing after the wicked beast, and no doubt the monsignore heard the barking."

It was useless to get anything out of Pietro.

He lied because he loved to lie, and then there had been the money that had crossed his palm.

"That will do," I said gravely.

I did not inform St. Hilary the next morning of my foolish boast to the duke. Nor did I tell him that the duke had already been bribing my servant to spy on me. Hearing that, he would, I was sure, insist upon our postponing the search for the casket until the week was over. That would not suit my plans at all. But I did tell him of the duke's pseudo casket. He was delighted at this turn of affairs.

"So our friend the comedian has discovered a casket all by himself," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands with joy. "His object, of course, is to gain the consent of Miss Quintard to marry him. Now that he has obtained that, he will cease to bother us, if, indeed, he has concerned himself about us at all. But I forgot," he added hypocritically, seizing my hands. "You, my dear Hume, do not consider this good news at all."

"If it were true that Miss Quintard were actually engaged to the duke," I replied indifferently, "I should tell you and the casket to go to the devil. But I happen to know that she will wait a week, at least, before binding herself to him or any other."

"Capital, my dear Hume, capital! In a quarter of an hour I shall be dressed. A cup of coffee and a cigarette, and we will continue our search. It is early, but not too early to interview a servant mopping a doorstep."

The Palace Cæsarini, as every tourist knows, is one of the most beautiful and historic in Venice. Its distinguishing mark, however, is the square tower that stands at its rear. The campanile, as bare of ornament and as stolid as one of those towers of defence one sees at Regensburg, is no more than a case for the stairway inside. Ugly as it is, it serves to bring into more striking contrast the lightness and delicacy of the Gothic jewel-work of the façade of the palace. Five arches, richly carved with foliage, support the upper stories. The loggia beneath is exquisitely proportioned. The broad marble steps, leading to the water's edge, extend the whole width of the palace front. The pointed windows, Moorish in the profusion of their carving, are noticeable because of the quaintly grotesque beasts, with monstrous tails and protruding tongues, that are carved in niches between each window.

Our interest in the palace, however, was centered in the tower. From this tower we expected to be led to the eighth landmark. We thought

it most unlikely that the iron safes had any significance. For no imaginable reason, surely, could the clock-maker have chosen so public a hiding-place. Indeed, the casket might not be in the Cæsarini Palace at all; yet we expected to find it there. At first thought this seemed unreasonable. Why should he have hidden the gems in another house? The existence of the iron safes suggests the answer.

St. Hilary had read in the Annals of the Inquisition that the last work Giovanni had undertaken was the building of these safes. When once he had determined to steal the casket he must have thought of a hiding-place. He knew that his own house was impossible. The mechanism of these safes was intricate and delicate. They would require constant attention and repair. The clock-maker would have, therefore, frequent access to the palace, and provided that he was successful in once hiding the casket there, he could take away the stones at his leisure. Here, then, if this theory was correct, the son had hidden the casket. For as his father's assistant he would naturally have had access to the palace.

St. Hilary and I rang the bell at the side door of the palace on the Calle Bianca Madonna. It

was a less conspicuous entrance than that on the Grand Canal. The majordomo, summoned by us, peremptorily frowned on our modest request to be permitted to see the curious tower and the safes.

"No, signori," he protested, swelling out a chest resplendent with gold braid, "this is no time for tourists to visit the palace."

"Tourists!" cried St. Hilary indignantly. "Have I not told you we are distinguished architects?"

"Because," continued the majordomo patiently, closing his eyes, as if he had not heard the interruption, "all the palace is in confusion. To-morrow night the Princess Cæsarini gives the famous *bal masqué*. You can understand, then, that this is no time to visit our palace."

"But we could at least see the safes. They interest us particularly."

"The safes, signore! Pooh, pooh, they have been made into furnaces long ago."

"But the tower—we can visit that without troubling you. We are writing a book on curious towers."

The man shrugged his shoulders obstinately. "After to-morrow night, perhaps. I do not know. Certainly not till then. And even then

our princess may not care to have the gentlemen come. She goes to Paris the day after, and the palace will be closed."

This was alarming news.

"Closed!" persisted St. Hilary, and it was impossible to mistake the note of satisfaction in his voice. "Closed! And does no one stay to take care of it?"

"But certainly," replied the servant suspiciously, "I stay and all the servants; and then, let me tell the gentlemen, unless the princess commands, no one, not even the king, has admittance."

I thought St. Hilary's eagerness most indiscreet, but he was in no way abashed.

"It is to be a very exclusive ball, I suppose."

"Of an exclusiveness that will exclude all *Inglesi* and *forrestieri*," cried the servant maliciously, and shut the door in our faces.

"Do you think your suspicions and vulgar curiosity quite apropos, St. Hilary?" I demanded vexatiously, as we turned from the door.

"Oh, thick of head and slow of understanding," he retorted in wild good humor. "Do you think that I asked my questions without reason? I wanted to know if it were not better for us to postpone our explorations till after this precious ball. I have learned definitely that it would be

quite useless. If Madame La Princesse goes to Paris immediately after, it is not likely that she will bother her head giving tourists or architects permission to explore her palace. As to forcing our way in afterward, you heard what the man said. For my part I prefer to enter the palace as a guest. We must resort to the jimmy and the dark-lantern as a last extremity. Certainly we must go to that ball."

"Without an invitation, and costumes?"

"Assuredly not. And the costumes I have in my mind's eye for you and myself will fit our figures to a marvel. You, the stolid pig, shall be resplendent as the Doge. As for me, I shall be bravely clad in doublet and hose as the captain of the guard. And behold, in that room yonder probably repose our costumes this very moment."

St. Hilary had tossed his head to a window of a pretentious apartment on the second story.

"We are going to hire costumes from a shop?"

"What!" he cried in horror. "You have lived in Venice three years, and mistake the apartments of one of the most aristocratic families of Venice for a costumer's shop. Fie, fie!"

"You are not going to steal the costumes and the tickets?" I cried in dismay. St. Hilary's

methods were always so beautifully direct and unscrupulous.

"I am not going to steal them. I am going, as it were, to squeeze the costumes off the noble backs of two gallant cavaliers I know slightly, and the tickets out of their pockets. Oh, they will gladly oblige me, those young gentlemen."

"But why?"

"Why, my friend? Because it so happens that I hold a little note that is signed jointly in the writing of the noble youths. Now if I were to postpone the necessity of their paying those notes for a month or two, or if I removed the necessity of payment altogether, would they not be duly grateful?"

As I have said, St. Hilary's methods were always so beautifully direct and unscrupulous.

CHAPTER XXIV

St. Hilary and I were smiling at ourselves before the pier-glass in my bedroom. It seemed to me quite impossible that we could be recognized.

As a captain of the Inquisitorial Guard St. Hilary was inimitable. His black eyes, as bright and piercing as any swashbuckler's, glowed through the velvet mask with a ferocity that was startling. His leanness and agility, the stiff carriage of his compact and sinewy little body, the gray goatee and mustachios, all distinctive of St. Hilary, were quite as distinctive of the part he had taken. Nothing could be more thoroughly foreign, more Italian.

He was pleased to approve of me. A magnificent robe of old Genoese velvet, bordered with ermine, the Doge's cap, with one great stone glowing in the front, made of me a most imposing personage. The velvet mask completed my disguise. We might or might not be mistaken for the two gallant young noblemen whose costumes St. Hilary had "squeezed" from them, but at least we were not ourselves.

And so, seated stiffly upright, not to crush our gorgeous costumes, we started late in the evening for the ball at the Cæsarini Palace.

Propelled with vigorous strokes, we swept down the Grand Canal. It was impossible not to enter into the adventure with spirit and abandon. Our going to the ball was audacious enough. But the ball itself was a mere bagatelle to us. We were about to loot a palace. It is not every day that one has such big game to key one's nerves to fighting pitch.

We glided silently and swiftly down the broad stream. Glimmering lanterns of other gondolas danced about us. Every moment we overtook and were passed by guests. Every Rio poured forth its tribute, a doge, a monk, a queen, a knight. As we neared the palace the gondolas almost touched, so dense was the throng. A compact mass, we drifted toward the blaze of light pouring from the open hall of the Cæsarini Palace.

Slowly, one by one, the gondolas were deftly guided to the marble steps. St. Hilary grasped my arm. He whispered his last instructions. I was not an adept at this sort of thing.

"We must keep together as much as possible. But first, we shall have to separate. To find our way to the tower, that is the main thing. If you

find the way clear thither, you must indicate it to me by resting your forefinger lightly on your thigh. I shall show you I have found it by resting the same finger on the hilt of my dagger. Once in the tower, we can determine our next move. The chances are that it will be open to the guests from the garden. A dark tower is an admirable retreat for a couple to make love in."

As St. Hilary was whispering these words in my ear, my attention was distracted by the gondola floating by our side. Its oarsmen were vainly attempting to cut across our bows. Our own gondoliers were unwilling to give way. Before I could interfere, we had jammed the other gondola against the variegated red and blue posts placed before every Venetian palace. Instantly the curtains of the felsa of the neighboring gondola were drawn aside. The head of a cardinal was thrust out. Forgetting that I was in costume, I drew back to avoid being seen. The cardinal was Duke da Sestos. He had doffed his mask while he shouted to our men to make way. Awed by the ducal coronet on his gondola, our oarsmen paused. The other shot forward and drew up at the steps of the palace. Alighting there, the duke handed out two ladies. I recognized them as Mrs. Gordon

and Jacqueline, in spite of their masks and disguise.

In our turn we paused at the water's edge. Servants dressed in the costume of the gondoliers of the fifteenth century stood in a row to receive us. Two of them steadied the gondola; another placed his little platform of green baize; the fourth offered a deferential arm. I gathered my robe about me, and we stepped from the platform to the crimson carpet. Surrendering our tickets to our friend the majordomo, who bowed to us much more courteously than he had done the day before, we advanced slowly down the hall, glowing with a thousand candles. I noticed with satisfaction that the doors of glass leading into the garden were wide open. We should have no difficulty in entering the tower, then, unless its gates were locked. The full moon fell with a soft radiance on the playing fountain, the statues, and the bare whiteness of Italian seats. But we dared not enter the garden.

With a Mephistopheles crowding me close on one side and St. Hilary on the other, the train of a Lucretia Borgia dragging in front, and the lance of a Don Quixote poking me in the back, I ascended a stairway, impressively noble in its

proportions. Along its entire length at intervals were placed busts of some great ancestor of the House of Cæsarini. They stood in niches of the wall and on the balustrade of each turn of the stairway.

The grand staircase ended in a great square hall. A full-length portrait of Prince Cæsarini on horseback looked down on us. A row of servants stood at the two open folding-doors leading into the sala. On either side of the sala were the usual reception-rooms and card-rooms.

This sala of the Cæsarini Palace, one of the most impressive in Venice, both in size and plan, is a square apartment, one side facing the Grand Canal, the other, a little side canal. Quite two-thirds of the room is raised above the rest of the floor, and is ascended by three marble steps. The effect on entering was indescribably brilliant. Dancing had already commenced on this immense dais. Every moment a couple descended and ascended the marble steps. The air was heavy with perfume. The strange costumes were reflected in a score of mirrors sunk in the walls at intervals between the tapestries. Through the velvet masks gleamed dark and languorous eyes that beckoned and challenged seductively. Already here and there a nymph

fled with light laughter; a satyr pursued with eager eyes. One felt that license would go far before these masks were removed at supper.

I missed St. Hilary almost immediately. Jacqueline and the duke were dancing. I watched them gloomily. On what mad errand were St. Hilary and I bent to-night? We had forced ourselves here by browbeating two weak young fools, who were no doubt quite ready to turn and rend us. If we were exposed! And before Jacqueline! We were absolutely no more respectable than two thieves whose eyes are fixed greedily on the silver spoons.

My arm was jogged. St. Hilary stood beside me. His eyes danced. His forefinger rested lightly on the hilt of his dagger. I strolled after him. He led the way directly to one of the *camerini*. He paused before a Titian. I stared at a Giorgione. He sauntered on. I kept him just in sight. We passed through half a dozen of the square little rooms. We entered the last of them, where several men were gathered about a punch-bowl. St. Hilary dropped into a chair in the corner. I occupied the chair next to him. Presently, when a burst of loud laughter came from the men at the punch-bowl, he leaned forward and picked up an imaginary pin. "I know where the casket is."

I started violently.

"I have traced it from the tower."

"You have traced it from the tower!" I repeated incredulously.

"To this room," he whispered. "You remember the scene of the seventh hour?"

"*And in the seven and twentieth day of the month was the earth dried,*" I murmured.

"Precisely. The twenty-seven steps from the summit of the tower bring one to a door that opens on a passage. The other door to that passage is just to the right of your chair."

"And how do you know that?" I demanded, staring at it.

"A lady fainted a few minutes ago. She was carried through that door to the landing for air. While the door was open I made good use of my opportunity, and I have taken the precaution to put the key of the door opening on to the tower into my pocket."

I looked about me eagerly for the eighth landmark. The four walls were not suggestive.

"The painted ceiling," prompted St. Hilary.

I looked upward. The decoration of the ceiling represented a king rising from his throne in the act of greeting a woman who made obeisance before him. I recognized the figures as those of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

The throne had six steps. At the base of the steps crouched two lions.

"And now that we have found the eighth landmark?" I asked quietly.

"The numbers are 6 and 2," he whispered. Then aloud, in Italian, "Shall we go into the ball-room?"

I took St. Hilary's arm. We passed through a succession of reception-rooms, and as we entered each room I felt the familiar and significant pressure. Passing through six of these rooms, we were in the sala again.

The decorous dancing of an hour ago had given way to a rout, a pageant, a scene of childish abandon and folly. The younger of the aristocracy of Venice had each assumed some classic character. Arm in arm, a wild procession of shepherds crowned with chaplets, bacchantes, and goddesses romped across the stage. There was Jason with his golden fleece, Thetis with her sea-nymphs, Orpheus with a pair of loving-birds on his wrist.

Round and round the great ball-room, up and down the marble steps, swept the procession. Presently it stopped abruptly. With a wild shout, they swept down on the laughing spectators; each Jack chose an incongruous Jill.

Apollo made captive Catherine di Medici; Pomona, Falstaff; Hebe, Mephistopheles.

Too late, St. Hilary and I turned to flee. A chain of flowers deftly tossed by white arms made us prisoners, St. Hilary to Diana, myself to a Mermaid. The grotesque mob again formed in procession. To the flourish of trumpets and the beating of drums, after encircling the ball-room once more, they proceeded to the supper-room. There, of course, each was expected to unmask.

It was impossible to retreat. Every step brought us nearer to exposure and disgrace. This knowledge, disagreeable enough in itself, was made doubly embarrassing when my fair jailer whispered coyly in my ear that not all the disguise in the world could deceive her. It was evident, of course, that she had taken me for the man whose costume I wore, and that tender passages had passed between the two before now. I muttered some incoherent reply. I followed miserably after St. Hilary and his inamorata.

But even at the eleventh hour came a reprieve. St. Hilary had guided his fair unknown past the supper-room, down the stairway. I followed his example. At the foot of the stairway we turned

to the right, and so made our way into the moonlight of the garden. The shades of Elysium are not more grateful to perturbed spirits than was to us the dark bower overgrown with yellow jessamine and honeysuckle. But the girl at my side had become suspicious. I had spoken no word. She drew back in alarm. At that instant St. Hilary's Diana discovered her mistake. There was an hysterical cry from each of the girls. Together they fled down the path to the palace, while St. Hilary followed them with mocking laughter. Then we plunged into the arbor. We were saved.

CHAPTER XXV

A MOMENT we listened. St. Hilary lighted a cigarette.

"Idiot," he chuckled, "to intrude on a doting couple. There might have been kisses, who knows?"

"But why did she not recognize you sooner?"

"Because I happen to have a figure that is not unlike her swain's, I suppose. As to my voice, have I not heard many times the squeak of the noble Conti, and am I not a mimic on occasions?"

"But surely I do not resemble the other noble Conti?"

"In that bulging robe, with that beard and mask, you might be equally an angel of light or the very devil himself. I am glad you had wit enough not to speak."

"And now?" I asked impatiently.

"After we have slipped the bolt of that little gate in the garden wall over there, we will make our way up the tower and hide until the guests have gone. We dare not trust ourselves in the

palace again after our escapade. That gate opens on the side street. We shall be glad to avail ourselves of it later."

We were about to leave the arbor when a Punchinello strolled down the garden path, a poodle at his heels. He was humming a French song, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He passed by a pergola of grapevines without once turning in our direction. Recognizing the dog, I guessed the identity of the clown. It was the man who had been tampering with Pietro's honesty a night or two before. His presence at the palace was alarming, but I said no word to St. Hilary of my fears. Spies or no spies, I was going to find that casket to-night!

When the garden was again deserted I drew the bolts of the gate, then followed St. Hilary up the steps of the tower. All the guests were at supper, and we met no one.

At the summit of the tower the sides were wide open to the sky. A low parapet ran around the sides. The roof rose to an apex some ten or twelve feet above. Two broad timbers, just out of reach, stretched across the roof. Rusty rings were still embedded in them. In former days this had been a bell-tower. I pointed out the timbers to St. Hilary.

"There is our hiding-place if any one comes.

Could you reach those beams if I gave you a back?"

He did not answer. He was looking down the dark stairway. He rose and leaped on the parapet.

"It is time to make the attempt. People are coming up the stairs."

In five seconds we were lying side by side.

"Whatever happens, you must not betray yourself. If you do, remember, you betray me, and you promised to stand by me, no matter what happened."

I nodded; then, peering over, I saw my mask lying on the bench where I had thrown it down. I pointed it out to St. Hilary.

"Shall I risk jumping down for it?"

"No, no. There is no logical clue between a mask on a bench and two gentlemen playing eavesdroppers a few feet above."

There was a rustle of silk; a faint sigh of a woman catching her breath; then a ripple of light laughter.

"We are not the first, duke, to enjoy this wonderful view," cried a clear voice.

I leaned recklessly over. Jacqueline was holding my mask toward Duke da Sestos. And they were alone.

I had just given my promise to St. Hilary,

but I had not reckoned on this. To leap down now would mean that I must betray him; to remain, that I must listen. I was in an agony of indecision. Again I hesitated, and again I was to pay a bitter penalty.

"Oh, it is worth the climb," cried Jacqueline enthusiastically. "That blaze of lights is the Piazza San Marco, of course. And the long line to the north?"

"Are the lights of the Riva," answered the moody voice of the duke.

His tone frightened me. I felt that he was regarding her with burning glances. Jacqueline must have noticed it had she not been enraptured with the fairy scene before her.

"The little splashes of light here and there are the campos, of course. But the Grand Canal! I never dreamed of anything so wonderful. Look, it has just one broad band of moonlight across its gloom. How fearfully tragic it must look on a cloudy night! But now, it is beautiful. And the tiny flickers of dancing light from the lanterns on the gondolas make the effect magical. Is it any wonder that, after all, one is a slave to the beauty of this Venice? Perhaps," she added dreamily, "one might have more ignoble dreams and ambitions than to live always in the midst of this beauty. I believe

there is nothing on earth so beautiful as this scene."

"There is yourself," a hoarse voice broke in on her revery. "There is yourself, and to-night you are more beautiful and exquisite than the very citadels of Paradise."

I trembled. It was to come, then, this declaration of love; and I must listen. It was now too late to descend. I could only pray that they would soon go. To my joy, this time Jacqueline did recognize the danger of her lingering.

"And below, what a mass of gondolas! How little did I think that I should ever go to a ball in a gondola! I can not thank you enough for bringing me here. But my aunt is waiting at the next landing. She will be wondering."

"No," broke in the duke's hoarse voice, "she will not."

"And why not, please?" demanded Jacqueline.

"I have told Mrs. Gordon that I must see you alone. You have avoided me all the evening—all the day—ever since Mr. Hume insulted me by denying that I had found the casket. And now that I have my opportunity it shall not escape me."

"If my aunt has given you permission to detain me here against my will, she has gone be-

yond her right. That she is not waiting for me makes it still more necessary to descend."

"You must not go. You will not be so cruel. You shall not go. You shall not go, by heaven, until you have told me why you refuse to listen to me!"

"Do you think that my regard for you will grow stronger because you detain me here against my will?" Jacqueline asked indignantly.

"My glorious one, you are beautiful when you are angry," he cried passionately. "I do not forget that you are only a nun for the hour. Beneath those funereal robes beats a heart of passion and fire like mine. Like mine, do you hear? It is time you were wooed and won."

"I hardly understand you, Duke da Sestos." Even now there was no fear in her voice.

"Oh, you understand, my white dove," he continued in a tone that made my blood boil. "You understand perfectly. Even in America, I suppose, young girls do not climb towers alone at night without first of all counting the cost."

I had heard quite enough. St. Hilary and his casket might go to the devil. I gathered up my cumbersome robes. St. Hilary, his black eyes glowing into mine a few feet away, made a fierce but cautious gesture to lie still. If I did so it was not because of St. Hilary, but consideration

for my own dignity. Jacqueline would never forgive me if I appeared now, I thought. And by his next words the duke seemed to have come to his senses at last.

"Heavens," he cried despairingly, "I am mad! I have angered you. Forgive me. Say that you forgive me. You shall go when you have said that."

"If I forgive you," answered Jacqueline in a cold voice, "it is because I have failed to understand you."

"But tell me, before we go, why have you promised only to deny? I have been patient. I have endured all. But now, to-night, under this soft moonlight, under these burning stars, with Venice, the Queen of Loves, to listen, I tell you that I love you. Pledge your love to me—here—to-night."

"I insist that you let me go."

"In one moment. Tell me why you refuse to keep your word? Is it because that Mr. Hume made me ridiculous before you? If he had not interfered, you would have loved me. I would have made you love me."

"Really, Duke da Sestos, to be quite exact, you should say if *you* had not interfered."

"But when once you know what I know, when I have told you that he is a thief——"

"Thief?" cried my dear Jacqueline with scorn.

"Is he not a thief who breaks into your rooms, who binds you hand and foot, who steals from you——"

"You dare say that he has done that?" cried Jacqueline, lingering in spite of herself.

"I dare say to his face that he has done just that," replied the duke hotly. "He has done more than that. He has stolen your heart from me, and for that I shall never forgive him. Never. But I shall yet win you. You are mine. Give me my reward. I implore you. I command you. You are in my power. One kiss, and you shall go. I swear it. No, no, you shall not escape me."

She screamed. I lifted myself on my elbow to leap down. It was impossible to stay there longer. My robe caught on a nail. While I struggled to free myself the duke saw me, and as I alighted he struck me a violent blow.

He flung himself upon me and pinioned my arms. I struggled furiously, but he had me at a disadvantage. I was down. The moonlight fell on my face. He recognized me.

"Bah, it is our American friend; it is your Mr. Hume," he cried, with a contempt that was too careless for indignation. There was almost

a note of good-nature in his contempt, as if I were a loathsome but amusing species of reptile.

I rose panting to my feet. Hell itself can have no greater torment than I suffered then.

"Eavesdropper!" cried the duke, regarding me cynically.

Jacqueline looked at me in horror. "You were listening? And you made no effort to help me?"

The words were not spoken in reproach. It was as if she had uttered a simple truth that was convincing, hopelessly convincing.

I was silent. I could say nothing without betraying St. Hilary.

"Is every one low and despicable? Is there no honor in any one? You—my aunt—" she groped her way toward the stairs.

For the third time the duke and I looked into each other's eyes. He was smiling still in his amused, cynical way, but thoughtfully, too.

"So," he said at last, "you really were listening? Or had you other motives?"

"No," I said, quite truthfully. "You know perfectly well that I was not listening."

"I thought so. I am so sorry that I have disturbed Mr. Hume. And now to-night, I suppose, it is useless to keep an eye on him longer.

There will be no adventures to-night, I am afraid."

There was a note of real regret in his voice. Had he really known that I was here, or was he lying as usual? In any case, if I could convince him that for to-night, at least, I should make no further attempt to find the casket, he would leave St. Hilary in peace.

"You have beaten me to-night, it is true, but there are other nights. Remember that there are yet five days."

We descended the tower. I walked deliberately through the palace. The duke pretended not to watch me, but I knew that I should be followed. It was some minutes before my gondola came; for the last of the guests were leaving. I went at once to my rooms. I lighted the gas and exchanged the mummery in which I was clad for a suit of tweeds. Then, with an ulster and golf-cap for St. Hilary, I turned out the gas, made my way out into the garden at the rear, and in ten minutes had pushed open the little gate in the garden wall.

CHAPTER XXVI

The garden was dark. Only the bloom of a cherry tree and a line of lilies planted the length of the pergola showed white against the gloom. The waning moon hardly touched the top of the garden wall now, but fell full on the palace windows and the tower.

No light was to be seen. The last guest had departed. The Princess Cæsarini was grand enough lady to have her own ways in spite of those of the world; and one of them was to be in bed by two o'clock.

The question was, where should I find St. Hilary? I should look for him first, of course, in the tower. It was barely possible that he had waited for me. Scarcely half an hour had passed since I left the palace.

He was seated on the parapet, quietly smoking. He greeted me grimly.

"Well, you have made a nice mess of things. I should have known that failure is always the result of one's mixing up business and sentiment.

There can be no search for the casket to-night. Come, let's be going."

"Nonsense, St. Hilary," I cried sharply. "You know very well we shall finish our search to-night. It is natural that you should feel some annoyance—not with me, but with circumstances. I promised you I would not betray myself; but could you have lain quiet in my place?"

"Of course I could," he mumbled.

"As to there being no further search, why did you wait here if you intended to relinquish it? Why did you not go on with it alone? You have waited, hoping I should return."

"But you deliberately told the duke that you were hiding, waiting for a chance to find the casket. At least you hinted as much. He understood you to mean that. For aught we know he has put the palace on its guard."

"Yes," I answered angrily, "I told him that—deliberately. What else could I do? He must have guessed. But after discovering me, would he think it likely that I should return to continue the search? No. He has seen me leave the palace. He has followed me, or had me followed, to my rooms. He thinks that I am in bed. I am certain that no one has followed me here. He has seen me go out of the palace. He has

not seen me return. There is the matter in a nutshell."

"But has he seen me go out?" demanded St. Hilary.

"Are you sure he knows you were at the ball?"

"Ah, that's the question. I think we ought to fling up our search for to-night."

"I do not. The finding of that casket is my only chance for happiness now. Where is the key?"

"It is quite useless. It unlocks the outer door of the passage, but the inner door defies this key and some skeleton keys I have with me. Confound these old Italian locks! That round window over your head is the only chance. If you give me a leg up, I think I can pry it open and squeeze through."

So that was why he had waited! He had attempted, then, to carry on the search without me; he had waited for me only because he had found my help absolutely necessary. Suddenly, I mistrusted St. Hilary. It seemed difficult for his mind to work in normal grooves. Deceit and lying were as natural to him as breathing. And yet, with one exception, he had been fair and generous with me. Was it only to discard me when I was of no further use?

"But where does the window lead?" I demanded.

"We must take our chances as to that. I am the slighter. Let me go through first."

I stooped down and braced my arms against the wall. He lightly sprang on my shoulders. I felt him strain and tug at the casement. Then I heard a crack. Waiting a moment to be sure that the slight noise had not aroused any one, he spurned my shoulders, and leaped upward. For an instant his body hovered comically in mid-air. Then it disappeared.

I stood motionless against the wall, listening with all my ears. Five minutes passed, and I began to wonder if he had deserted me, when his head appeared through the window.

"I am standing on a bench. Jump, and catch my hands. This is the only chance to get into the palace that I can see."

I measured the window with my eye. I kicked a bit of mortar from between two stones in the wall. Edging my toe in, I sprang up. Twice I failed to reach his outstretched arms, but the third time I was successful. A strenuous minute, and I stood panting beside him.

We entered a draughty passage. St. Hilary went confidently to the door at the end, and push-

ing it open, he struck a match. We were in an anteroom. Huge presses ran up to the ceiling on three of the walls. The fourth wall was paneled, and in spite of my excitement, or perhaps because of it, I saw that it was covered with names carved in the oak. In other days this had undoubtedly been the page's room. And now I had another proof of St. Hilary's keenness. He opened the door of what I supposed to be one of the presses, and we were in the sala. The air was yet heavy with the smell of perfume and crushed flowers.

"Shall I light one of these candles?" I whispered. "Is it safe?"

He nodded, and I took one of the candles from its sconce. St. Hilary stood by the great fireplace, where two lions crouched.

"These must be the two lions of the eighth landmark," I said.

I held the candle high above my head. As the light flared, vague spectral forms seemed to spring out of the darkness and to vanish. Our shadows, gigantic and monstrous, danced grotesquely on the polished floor. In a dozen mirrors our figures were dimly reflected.

"The ninth hour?" demanded St. Hilary hoarsely.

"*And Joseph said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream, and behold, the sun and moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me,*" I answered.

He clutched my arm. He pointed far above the mantel.

At first I did not understand. In front of us yawned the great fireplace. Two bowed and wearied giants supported the hooded marble mantel, their feet braced fantastically against the two crouching lions. The polished breasts and thighs of the figures glowed in the faint candle-light. Above, the space from the mantel to the very ceiling was filled with paneling, dark and somber with age and smoke, all richly and delicately carved, a design infinitely confusing with its entwined and intricate figures. A medley of chariots and horses, armored warriors and banners, all impossibly crowded together, like a frieze in a Greek temple—that is my vague impression of the carving.

" The sun and the moon and the eleven stars," muttered St. Hilary, still pointing.

Suddenly I understood. It was the scene of Joshua going forth to battle, commanding the sun and moon to stand still. On the right shone the sun, its rays naïvely depicted; on the left shone the moon. Joshua held a banner in his hand, and on the banner were eleven stars.

"There must be a spring concealed in the paneling. If we strike one of those stars——"

St. Hilary did not finish his sentence. He carried a consol table toward the mantel. For once I was the quicker. I caught the mantel, braced myself on one of the giants, and so lifted myself up on it.

I struck each of the stars in turn sharply with my palm.

"Here—the dagger," cried St. Hilary, and taking the dagger he wore from his belt he tossed it up to me. Again I struck each of the stars with the hilt of the dagger. One moment I was staring at the paneling; the next, the paneling to the right of the chimney had slid noiselessly up and I was looking into a square hole big enough to admit one's body.

A clock somewhere in the palace struck the hour of four.

"It is the hour," I whispered, staring down at St. Hilary. "We are to inherit Time's legacy at last."

St. Hilary did not answer. He was scrambling up on the table.

I waved him back imperatively. His lack of self-control restored mine. Now that I was here I had no intention of giving way to him.

"Get down," I cried. "Are you mad? One

of us must keep watch. Before I crawl up into the shaft I shall lower the paneled door. Push away the table there. If any one should come——"

The sentence died on my lips. His sallow face, lighted by the feeble flicker of the candle, was flushed with intense excitement. One thinks of the taper as standing before holy altars, shining on meek-eyed Madonnas and saints. But the candle he held before him revealed something of the cunning greed of the miser in his glittering eyes, something of the fierce desire of the madman. He stood perfectly motionless, gazing upward at the ceiling. One might have thought he was in a trance.

"St. Hilary! St. Hilary!" I cried, shocked at this display of emotion. "What is it, man?"

His lips tried hard to speak, but no words came from them. Then he pointed upward to the beams above his head. I followed his tense gaze. Then I understood his strange excitement.

As in all Venetian palaces, the ceiling of this *sala grande* was made of massive beams stretching from wall to wall. The space between these sunken beams was covered with boards nailed on top of them.

In one of these sunken beams da Sestos had

hidden the casket. I could see it as I stood on the mantel, just out of my reach.

The spring that had released the paneling must have opened at the same time a tiny door at the side of this beam. As I moved my candle, I caught the gleam of shining metal. We had found the casket. The last three scenes of the hours, then, were meaningless.

I crawled into the shaft. I stood erect. My head was on a level with a space hardly more than a foot high between the ceiling of the sala and the floor of the apartment above. I drew myself painfully along this narrow interstice, St. Hilary's dagger in one hand and the candle in the other. When I had reached what I thought to be the location of the casket, I brushed the dust away, and I saw several brass nails driven into the boards, forming a small circle. I struck at the circle with the sharp dagger until I could thrust my arm through the aperture I had made. I felt along the beam immediately below, and I touched the cold metal. My fingers traveled lovingly over its smooth surface. Slowly and carefully I drew the casket from its hiding-place. It was heavy—incredibly heavy. Very faintly I heard St. Hilary utter a cry of joy. I closed the little door of the beam, then I lowered

myself into the shaft again, the precious casket clasped in both my hands. But the shaft was too narrow for me to leave it and still hold the casket. I must hand it first to St. Hilary. I stooped down and held it out. I had heard him step from the table to the mantel.

"Here it is, St. Hilary," I said hoarsely.

It was clutched, brutally, out of my lingering grasp. A sharp blow struck my hand, then there was darkness. The paneled door had been closed. I heard the spring click as it shut tight. St. Hilary had played me false. Too late I thought of my distrust of him.

I pulled myself up into the shaft again to fetch the dagger I had left on the floor above. I struck the paneling along the edge of the top until I had located the spring. Then I hacked at the hard board till I felt it give way. I raised it cautiously and stepped out on the mantel. It had taken me half an hour to free myself.

CHAPTER XXVII

Closing the panel door after me, I sprang lightly to the floor. I did not dare attempt to escape from the palace by the way of the tower. I stole across the polished floor out to the landing. I listened at the head of the stairs. In the hall below I could hear the clatter of wooden pattens on the marble flags. There was the swish of a broom. A door slammed, then all was still. I descended the stairway rapidly.

To my joy the double doors of glass leading out into the garden were open. I might be seen from the window of the palazzo while crossing the garden to the little gate, but I had to take the chance. I stole out into the garden. I gained the shelter of the pergola. I reached the gate, slipped out into the street, and closed it behind me. In two minutes I had lost myself in the market crowd in the Campo San Bartolomeo.

And now what should I do? It was impossible to avail myself of the ordinary channels of the law. I had no more legal right to the casket

than had St. Hilary. I must rely on my own wits.

Would he already have left Venice? Perhaps. In that case it would be a stern, almost a hopeless, chase. But if he had not done so, how would he attempt to escape from me?

I looked at my watch. It was not quite five. I knew that the next train leaving Venice was at eight-thirty. A boat sailed to Trieste three times a week. One left Venice this evening at seven. At twelve a P. and O. liner sailed for Brindisi. These were the regular means of travel. But nothing could be more simple than for him to hire a craft. If one pays enough, one can go anywhere. The search seemed almost hopeless.

Obviously, the first thing for me to do was to go to St. Hilary's hotel. I was not so simple as to expect to find him there, but I might learn if he had made any plans beforehand to leave Venice.

His hotel was on the Riva, not far from Danielli's. The concierge knew me well, and in answer to my careless inquiry as to whether St. Hilary had been in his rooms since last night, he went up-stairs to inquire. There was no answer to his knock. I bade him open the door, and told him I would wait for my friend. He did so, and I entered.

My worst fears were realized. Two heavy trunks were strapped and labeled. The address was simply in the care of a forwarding agent in London.

His razors and hair-brushes, however, were still on the dressing-table, and an open bag on the chair. If he had planned returning to his rooms he would not imperil the loss of the casket by bothering about these paltry toilet articles. That was my first thought. But even as I was closing the door behind me I paused. Would he not, indeed? He was still in the fancy costume of the ball. True, he had my ulster and golf cap, but the day promised to be warm. Could he travel thus without attracting attention? Unless he were to leave Venice by private boat, he would be almost sure to change his clothes. I abandoned my intention of going to the railway station. I would remain here at his rooms. And yet I must send some one. Whom could I trust? There was Pietro, of course; he knew St. Hilary. But Pietro had played me false; he would play me false again, unless I made it worth his while not to do so. I must make it worth his while. I sent one of the hotel servants to fetch my man. In twenty minutes he arrived, smiling.

I had taken the precaution the night before

to put a considerable sum of money in my pockets. I did not know what emergency might confront us before the dawn, or how soon it might be convenient for us to leave Venice. I dangled a hundred-lire note suggestively before Pietro's nose. I assured him that I knew he was an arrant rogue. I sympathized with him (or pretended to) in his determination to sell his rascally services to the highest bidder. I hinted that this hundred-lire note should not be the last if he could only make up his mind to obey me implicitly for a few hours or days.

Pietro gulped with emotion. He swore by all his hopes of heaven and with tears that he loved me dearly. He could not take my money. He would cheerfully murder any enemy of mine out of sheer gratitude for my kindness to him; but he could not take the money. No, no, not for himself, but—for expenses, yes. He pocketed the note with an oily smile.

My directions to him were simple. He was to betake himself to the railway station. He was first of all to assure himself that St. Hilary was not on the eight-thirty train. If he were not on that train, Pietro was to keep watch for him on the landing of the railway station until six o'clock in the evening. If the dealer was on the eight-thirty train, or if he appeared later, Pietro

was to go where he went, if that meant to the ends of the earth. But, above all, he was to keep out of sight.

I had still the P. and O. liner and the boat to Trieste to watch. The liner I could take care of myself from St. Hilary's window, or better still, a seat on the Riva under the hotel awning. She was anchored not a hundred feet away, and I could readily make out every passenger who boarded her. As for the boat to Trieste, it did not go until seven in the evening, and I could recall Pietro from his post at six if necessary; for there was no train between six and nine.

I could do nothing more at present except keep a watchful eye open for St. Hilary, and that, as I have said, I could do as well, or even better, from the Riva below. And now that I was forced to inaction for the present, I was conscious that I had had nothing to eat since the evening before.

I locked St. Hilary's door after me. I settled myself at a little table under the red-and-white striped awning, where, quite inconspicuous myself, I could see every one who entered or came out of the hotel.

The sun rose higher and higher over San Georgio's. The golden angel on the campanile grew brighter and brighter, until she seemed a

thing alive, quivering in her eagerness to spring into that deep lake of blue. The dazzling whiteness of the pavement toward the Molo gradually became alive with moving spots of variegated color. The teeming life of the broad street amused me for a while. But now that the excitement was passed, now that I was very near despair, though I would not acknowledge it, I found it difficult to be alert. It seemed useless to make any pretence at watching at all. I felt very sleepy.

The heat of the early afternoon became almost intolerable. I struggled and fought against an almost overpowering drowsiness. Suddenly I was wide awake. Duke da Sestos had just come out of Danielli's. He was walking toward me. He saw me. He raised his hat, and smiled.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Ah, it is my friend Hume," he purred. "I had thought that Mr. Hume had left Venice."

I ignored the left hand he extended negligently toward me. He had as many changes of front as a Russian diplomatist. Then I laughed. His cool effrontery was downright amusing.

"And why should I have left Venice?" I asked easily. "Did you think you had frightened me off last night?"

"Ah, ha," he twirled his mustache with the utmost good-nature, "I know my friend Hume too well to think that he is so easily frightened. But it is a pity that your wit, my friend, is not as great as your courage."

"And how is my stupidity manifesting itself just at present?"

He threw back his head and laughed silently —at least, insofar as a cat can laugh. Then he lowered himself into a chair by my side, leaned forward, and tapped me lightly on the shoulder.

"I am clairvoyant. *Par example,* you are waiting for a friend, *n'est ce pas?* Oh, I do not

mean myself. Shall we call that friend Mr. St. Hilary?"

"And then——"

"And then," he continued jocularly, "if this Mr. St. Hilary should not come—if he had not a notion of coming?"

"I should be a fool to sit here—is that the inference?"

His shoulders shook, as if he found the joke amusing. But how should he know anything of St. Hilary's movements? Or, guessing them, that I could be seriously affected by them?

"Am I to understand," I demanded, sitting upright, "that you have information as to Mr. St. Hilary's whereabouts?"

"Very precise information, I assure you, my friend," he cried, his blue eyes dancing. "When one sees a gondola racing to the railway station, with two rowers, so great is the hurry, one may reasonably infer that the gentleman who sits under the felsa smoking a cigarette is on his way to take a train, hein?"

"So you saw Mr. St. Hilary on his way to the railway station?" I said slowly. "And the time?"

"It was not so late as seven, and certainly not before half-past six."

My worst fears were realized. Pietro had let

him slip through his fingers at the eight-thirty train. But at least I would not give this Italian the satisfaction of seeing the consternation the news gave me, and I answered indifferently:

"A little trip to Milan, I suppose. If he had been going far I should certainly have seen him before his departure."

"But, Mr. Hume," cried the duke in triumph, "when the gondola is piled high with boxes, is it reasonable to think that our friend simply runs off to Milan? No, no; Naples, perhaps, or Paris, or London."

"What! You saw his trunks?" I cried.

The duke held up his five fingers.

"So many."

I turned easily in my seat and looked him over coolly. I had every reason to believe that St. Hilary possessed only two trunks, and that these two trunks were in his room up-stairs.

"Yes, it is strange that he should not have said good-by to me," I said musingly.

"*Is* it so strange?" queried the duke, and again he tapped me on the shoulder. "Come, come, Mr. Hume, have I not said that I am clairvoyant?"

"Your proofs have not been convincing. Suppose that you give me a better illustration of this remarkable gift of yours."

"Well, then, I could have told you yesterday that your friend would bear watching."

"You seem to know a good deal about the character of Mr. St. Hilary," I said, and rose from my seat with a yawn.

The duke rose and took my arm. He had not yet done with me, it appeared.

"You walk toward the Piazza? Permit me to walk with you. Yes, yes, I know a good deal of your friend's character. We have had many interesting talks together before now; and, let me tell you, Mr. St. Hilary did me the honor of bidding *me* good-by."

"And is that the reason you are so happy?" I asked, staring at him. My question had been put seriously. For the first time this afternoon I was interested in his answer.

"So happy?" he retorted, shrugging his shoulders; then, with apparent frankness, "But I am to see Mr. St. Hilary again. Yes; I am to join him presently at Naples, perhaps, or Paris, or London. By the way, you have yet three days in which to prove me a liar," he added good-humoredly.

"And three days are a long time sometimes," I said curtly. "Good afternoon; I take a gondola here to my rooms."

"Adieu," he purred, but he still held my arm.

"Do you remember that charming afternoon we spent, all four of us, in my poor palazzo? I presented to each of the ladies a little souvenir. To Mrs. Gordon I gave the useless old clock; to Miss Quintard, the chest that once contained the casket I have found and given to her. But to you I gave nothing. Our dealer, I have reason to think, has consoled himself. To you alone, my friend, I have been remiss."

"Your regret is touching," I murmured.

"But there is a little book I came across the other day when I was packing up my few belongings. It is only fourteen pages, but these fourteen pages are interesting. I have known travelers go all the way to St. Petersburg to consult them. Would it amuse you—this little souvenir? Or am I to infer that since the departure of your co-laborer in antiquarian studies you are no longer interested in curiosities?"

If I could have flung him into the muddy waters of the canal I should have been a little less miserable, but I affected the utmost delight. In the first place, I was really interested in seeing those pages. Again, I hoped to understand a little more clearly the drift of this afternoon's talk. His reference to St. Hilary mystified me.

"I shall be charmed to receive it," I cried.

The duke had watched my momentary indecision with evident anxiety. Now he seized my arm again and squeezed it in the warmth of his satisfaction. His face was radiant.

"Good! Good! My rooms are but a few feet from the Capello Nero."

"So St. Hilary informed me," I said pointedly.

"Ah, he is a wonderful man, your friend. Such resource, such imagination! And always on the lookout for himself, hein?"

The duke's apartments were almost empty of furniture. There were no rugs on the floor, no belongings of a personal nature in sight. The pictures were covered, and the chairs formally ranged about the walls. The clock on the mantelpiece had stopped. Some old newspapers and magazines heaped on the library table were the only sign that the room was lived in. Otherwise the room was bare.

"You must excuse the appearance of my poor chambers; I leave Venice this evening."

"All the world seems to be leaving Venice today," I observed lightly.

"Absolutely. First of all, your friend Mr. St. Hilary, and now Mrs. Gordon, her niece, and myself. My poor friend, you will be lonely, I fear."

"Your concern touches me," I said, and walked to the window. "When I have received from you my souvenir, I am going to my rooms to make preparations for leaving Venice myself."

The duke was turning over the magazines and papers on the library table.

"Everything is in confusion. I can not find my little book. Old Luigi is an imbecile. Perhaps he has destroyed these precious fourteen pages. May I trouble you to ring the bell near that window? We will ask Luigi."

I was puzzled, I confess it. Why had he brought me to his apartment? Simply to gloat over me? Or had he some purpose more useful than that?

There was a knock at the door. Instead of bidding the servant enter, the duke himself answered it, stepping out in the hallway, closing the door carefully after him.

I walked over to the table, and turned over carelessly the papers and magazines. The glint of steel caught my eye. He had hidden a revolver under the rubbish while pretending to look for the fourteen pages. In two seconds it was in my pocket and I had taken my stand at the window again, one hand in my coat pocket, the other pulling at my mustache.

"That imbecile Luigi had put away the pages

for safe keeping in a portfolio. But he is to fetch the portfolio at once."

He seated himself carelessly on the table, swinging one leg. He picked up an illustrated weekly.

"Are you interested in horses? Here are some capital snap-shots of good riding during the manœuvers at Asti."

I crossed the room and looked over his shoulder. When we had exhausted the magazines he bethought him of the pictures hanging on the wall. He lifted the muslin coverings and showed them to me, one by one, expatiating on their beauties. Evidently he was trying to kill time. Unconsciously I glanced at the clock, a modern timepiece about three feet high, standing on the mantel. I had forgotten that it had stopped. The hands, I noticed, stood at half-past six.

The duke now took up his position at the window, while I stood with my back to the mantel. It just reached my shoulder. For the first time it occurred to me that he had wished to get me away from the window. He wished the post of observation for himself. I wondered if it were worth while for me to join him.

For perhaps thirty seconds there was silence between us. I say thirty seconds, and I measured that interval by thirty ticks. At first I

heard them listlessly. They were faint, muffled, and strangely slow. Then I remembered with a start that the clock had stopped. It was impossible for them to come from the watch in my pocket. They sounded close to my ears, and my ears were not two inches away from the clock that had stopped.

For a moment the strange phenomenon bewildered me. Then I understood. The casket was inside the clock; and the mechanism that would release the cover in twelve hours had been set going.

As if the duke were the clairvoyant he had mockingly pretended to be, he turned sharply on his heel. I was gazing up at the ceiling.

"Luigi is a long time," he muttered. "It is possible that the thieves who broke into my rooms some months ago stole it after all."

"Thieves!"

"Yes, my friend, thieves. But I am taking precautions for my safety in the future." He laughed shortly, and looked out of the window again.

That hint was as foolish as my boast a few days before. So he had sent old Luigi for the gendarmes. He was holding me here. Well, I hardly cared to see the gendarmes just now. It was time for me to act.

I reached swiftly up. I lifted the clock from the mantel to the floor. The jar of the wheels as it touched the floor made him spin about like a mechanical toy. I was pointing the muzzle of his useful weapon at him over the clock.

"Sit down," I said quietly.

He clutched the edge of the chair, his mouth drooping.

"And quickly!" I cried sharply.

He sank into the chair behind him, his hands trembling violently.

"But—but—this is an outrage!" he gasped.

"My dear duke, you are not the only clairvoyant. In my poor way I can see through a wooden case. But this propensity of yours to play the cat with the poor little mouse is dangerous. Sometimes the little harmless mouse turns out to be a rat. And rats sometimes bite."

CHAPTER XXIX

For the second time I held the casket in my hand, but even now it was impossible for me to look at it. I had to keep my eye on the duke. I picked it up and walked to the table near which the duke was seated.

"Tell me," I asked laughingly, "did you bring me to this room for the sheer joy of gloating over my nearness to this toy that I have been struggling to possess for the past month, knowing how impossibly far it was from me? Did it afford you so much pleasure to play with me, to tease me, that you pushed your game so dangerously far? If so, you are an artist, my dear duke."

"Mr. Hume is generous in his compliments."

"Or," I continued, thrusting my face nearer to his, "am I mistaken in thinking that most of your words and deeds are spoken and acted with some purpose in view?"

"For example?" he asked lightly.

"For example," I repeated, "it was hardly for love of me that you spoke to me this afternoon."

"Hardly," he sneered, pale with rage and disappointment. "Rather because I hated you so much that I wished to amuse myself at your expense."

"Or is there a third possibility?" I continued scornfully. "That you wished to avenge yourself? While you were taunting me with St. Hilary's perfidy, or his supposed perfidy, the idea occurred to you that if you could induce me to come to your rooms, if you could hold me there while you sent Luigi for the gendarmes, you might have me committed to jail for assault, perhaps, or complicity in breaking into your rooms. On the whole, I am inclined to think that this view of the case is the most reasonable."

"As you will, Mr. Hume," he answered, his lips white and trembling.

"Now listen to me, Duke da Sestos. Granting that I am correct, the gendarmes will be here presently. Luigi has been gone some time. Before they come, I wish to put the case clearly before you. This casket and these jewels belong neither to me nor to you. They are the property of the state. When your gendarmes come, be sure I shall make that clear."

"Pooh! I have always known that you were a fool," he cried contemptuously.

"Ah, I thought you would listen to reason,"

I said quickly. "Now tell me frankly: Why have you been so keen on this hunt for the casket? Was it to please Miss Quintard or to please yourself?"

"Why not both? In pleasing myself perhaps I should be pleasing Miss Quintard."

"And perhaps not," I replied drily. "A truthful answer, duke, if you please. We have no time to lose—if you care anything for the baubles in this casket."

"Well, then, for myself," he said, looking at me curiously.

"And if I had not surprised you just now, you would have taken your casketful of jewels to London or Paris to dispose of them at leisure?"

"Perhaps," he assented insolently.

"Or would you have taken this casket to Miss Quintard and apologized for making a slight error?"

"Why could I not have done both?" he cried. "Yes, Mr. Hume, even if you give it to the gendarmes, the casket is mine—legally and morally. The state will grant my claim, and then——"

"That is the point I was coming to. Supposing you were offered a share of these baubles—I do not say how great a share—is it possible that you could be induced to give up the casket?"

"I have heard there is an English proverb that it is better to have a bird in one's hand than two birds in the bushes."

"But allow me to remind you that in this instance the bird is in my hands."

"For the present," he interrupted with a meaning glance.

"Come, come," I cried sharply, "we have had enough of this quibbling. I make you a sporting proposition. I will give you a share of these jewels for the casket."

"I am afraid," he said suspiciously, "my share would be rather a small one."

"It would be one-third," I said quietly. "I am not a thief. I covet no stolen property, and these stones were stolen. The price of blood is on them. Whether they were stolen to-day or five hundred years ago, the moral aspect of the case is the same. But I want that casket, and I must have it."

"Who gets the other two-thirds?" demanded the duke, like a greedy glutton. "St. Hilary, I suppose."

"If he can prove to me that he has played fair."

The duke thought a minute. "Very well, I agree."

I emptied the chambers of the revolver's car-

tridges. I put them into my pocket. I pushed the weapon carefully under the newspapers again.

"And now that the strain of the past five minutes is over, I suppose I may have a look at my casket?"

"With pleasure." The duke bowed sardonically.

In shape and size it was not unlike the pseudo da Sestos casket with which the duke had attempted to deceive Jacqueline.

It was of bronze, overlaid with plaques of gold, enriched with cloisonné enameled work and precious stones, cut for the most part *en cabochon*. The cover rose to an apex. At the apex was a knob of wrought gold, in shape a monster's head, the eyes formed of minute rubies. At the four corners of the cover were large semi-precious stones of chalcedony, rock-crystal, carbuncle, and turquoise. From these four stones to the knob of gold ran lines of pearls.

The sides of the casket were composed of rectangular plaques, alternately covered with symmetrical designs in colored cloisonné enamel, partly opaque and partly translucent. These plaques were studded with pearls framed with a cunning design of scrolls and filigree work.

"It would fetch a thousand pounds at Christie's any day," I mused.

"Will you tell me how long that toy must tick before the cover can be opened?" interrupted the duke.

"When did you set the mechanism?"

"At precisely twenty-five minutes to seven."

"Then in half an hour the casket will be opened."

There was a loud knock on the door.

"Ah, your gendarmes," I said coolly.

"And, as host, may I receive my guests?"

"Do," I urged, and seated myself in his chair, the casket on my knees.

He opened the door. Two impossibly solemn gendarmes entered, precisely alike as two files. Keeping step, each with each, their hands on their sword hilts, they advanced to the middle of the room and saluted. Old Luigi stood discreetly without. I hope it is no disgrace to confess that I awaited the duke's orders with some trepidation.

"We have received word," said the duke calmly, and he waved his hand toward me, "that an American gentleman, returning from the *bal masqué* at the Cæsarini Palace, early this morning, was assaulted by ruffians near the Calle Bianca Madonna, and knocked insensible. He

was then carried to an empty house in the Jewish quarter. It is the third right-hand house on the quay of the Mestre Canal as you enter it. Release the gentleman. Tell him that his friend, Signore Hume, wishes to speak with him here. See that he comes. That is all."

The gendarmes saluted as one man, spun about on their heels and marched from the room, their red and white plumes nodding.

"The gentleman to be found in the Jewish quarter is, of course, St. Hilary. It requires no great imagination to guess that you had him confined there. It would interest me to know how you managed last night."

"Oh, believe me, nothing could have been simpler," replied the duke. "I knew, you may be sure, that you were not spying on Miss Quintard and myself in the tower. As a matter of fact, I was bitterly disappointed when you showed yourself; for, frankly, Mr. St. Hilary and you had been seen ascending the tower, and it was known that you were concealed somewhere. But we had not thought of the beams up there. When you were discovered I had presence of mind enough not to rout out your friend. All we had to do, then, was to watch him. We made our way into the sala after you, and, lying concealed until the dramatic moment, my Punch-

inello took care of your friend, while I took care of your casket."

"But how did you know we were to take the casket that night?"

"You have been watched for a week. It is so much easier and more sensible to reap where others have sown than to dirty one's own fingers with the plow."

"Then," I said with a sigh of relief, "St. Hilary played fair?"

"So far as I know," replied the duke indifferently. "But I hear him coming up the stairs. You can ask him for yourself."

The door burst open, and St. Hilary rushed in. A bandage stained with blood and dirt was wrapped about his head. He was still in my ulster and golf cap. He looked as if he had spent a few bad quarters of an hour.

"You are just in time, St. Hilary," I cried, "to see the casket opened."

"What! You have beaten him after all!" He glared at the duke.

"With neatness and despatch," generously complimented the duke.

St. Hilary did not answer. He stood looking down at the casket, holding his watch in his hand. It was now six-thirty. The clock on the Piazza told the half-hour.

"Did you set the mechanism at six thirty-five precisely?" I asked anxiously.

"At six thirty-five precisely," answered the duke, frowning too in anxiety.

"Tut, tut! Do you expect the accuracy of a watch of the twentieth century in this mechanism?" replied St. Hilary irritably. "It may be several minutes before the casket opens."

"In that case, I fear, Mr. Hume, that you may have to delay fulfilling your promise to Miss Quintard."

"Why?" I asked.

"Do you forget that she leaves Venice at seven-thirty?"

"What are you talking about?" asked St. Hilary roughly, his eyes fixed on the casket.

"The duke has just been reminding me that the casket is legally his, and that, if necessary, he will lay his claim before the state."

"But we are not fools enough to care a straw about his claim," growled the dealer. "We have beaten him at his own game. It is too late for him to cry out."

"On the contrary," I said coolly, "the duke has induced me to recognize that claim."

"Yes, I have exchanged my casket for a share of its contents," added the duke suavely.

For a moment St. Hilary forgot to keep his

eye on the casket. He glared at me with blood-shot eyes.

"Surrendered his claim! To you? By heavens, do you think, Hume, that you can ignore me?"

"I have not ignored you, St. Hilary. If you lose the casket, you have two-thirds of the gems. It is better, I should think, to have that two-thirds than to have any trouble with the state."

"Precisely," beamed the duke.

"Very well," agreed the dealer grudgingly.

It was now a quarter to seven. Still we could hear the muffled tick.

"It really looks as if Mr. Hume would miss his train," mocked the duke.

At that instant there was a loud click. The duke started perceptibly. St. Hilary, pale with excitement, flung up his hands. I threw back the cover.

The room seemed suddenly irradiated with a flash of multi-colored light. Five great gems glowed in their compartments of purple velvet in the topmost tray. St. Hilary and the duke uttered cries of joy. If I must confess it, these stones affected me hardly more than a display in any jeweler's window in Bond Street or Fifth Avenue.

"The minutes are more precious to me than

those gems," I cried. "Take out the trays, or I shall empty the contents of the casket on the table."

"When once we have closed the shutters," said St. Hilary.

He started to go to the windows, but noticing that the duke did not move, he halted suspiciously. They were like two beasts with their prey between them.

"I will close the shutters for you," I said, laughing grimly at the greed that distorted their faces.

As I left the room with the casket in a bag which the duke procured for me, my last look caught a glimpse of the two men seated one on each side of the table. A lighted candle was at each elbow, and the trays of gems lay between them.

CHAPTER XXX

It was twenty minutes past seven when I paid my gondolier his fare at the railway station. I bought a first-class ticket to Milan and hurried down the long platform. Already the guards were calling to the passengers to take their places, and were closing the doors of the carriages.

Jacqueline herself I did not see, but her maid sat at the open window of a compartment reserved for women. Fortunately, it was a corridor train.

Before taking the casket to Jacqueline I cast one long look back at Venice. Never had her fairy architecture looked more entrancing, more ethereal. She was more mystical in this golden light than Arthur's City of Avalon. But this enchantress of the seas had proved but a siren after all. For me her beauty had crumbled to ashes. Like my dreams, she had proved bitterly disappointing; for these dreams had been as intangible and difficult to realize as her charm.

I was turning my face away from the city of dead hopes and vanished dreams confidently to

a workaday world; and if I could melt Jacqueline's pride, and win her forgiveness, I might yet look forward to love and happiness.

I walked slowly down the corridor to her compartment. I stood quietly at the door a moment. She turned from the open window where she had been standing. There were tears in her eyes.

"Do you not think that you have caused me enough pain and embarrassment without troubling me further just now?"

"Jacqueline, you asked me to bring you the casket. You promised that you would listen to me when I brought it. There it is. It has cost me something, that casket—your love and your respect. In doing precisely what you asked me, I have lost all that is dearest to me in the world. But there it is. It is really the casket of da Sestos."

I placed it on the seat beside her.

"All this is painfully theatrical, Mr. Hume," she said disdainfully. "I can have no possible use for it. Will you please take it again? I wish to heaven that I had never heard of it."

"Can you really be in earnest, Jacqueline?" I asked sadly. "Are you determined to be unjust? Are you quite resolved not to listen to me?"

"I am quite resolved," she answered scorn-

fully, "to be just to myself. And now will you please go?"

"I must go if you insist," I said gravely, and I stooped to pick up the casket.

Then I saw that I was indeed the fool St. Hilary had so often called me. For her dear eyes belied her cruel words. They were full of doubt and despair. They beseeched me to be strong, to be ruthless, to break down her outraged pride. She longed to understand, to forgive me, but I must make her understand.

I sat beside her; I held both her hands firmly in mine.

"Jacqueline, it is impossible for me to go like this. My happiness, yes, and your happiness as well, is at stake. You must listen to me. It is my right. I refuse to go until I have told you the story of this casket. But I want you to listen to that story without prejudice. When I have told you everything, I hope you will see that I have tried to do just what you wished me to do. I am trying to be, now, just what you wished me to be. Though I hurt you by staying, yet I shall stay; for you told me that the man you loved must have something of the relentless about him. I shall remain relentless until I have gained my happiness and yours."

"If it were possible for me to dispute the

evidence of my own eyes, how gladly I would listen and exonerate you!"

"Then listen, Jacqueline."

I told her of my search for the casket. I let the story plead for itself. When I had finished, she sat very still, her face shaded from the dim lamp in the center of the carriage by the partition of the seat.

"It was a foolish thing to ask," she said, her eyes shining. "But oh, Dick, I am glad I did ask it. I know now that you are really strong and patient. You would dare much for the woman you love. Forgive me that I did not trust you. I wanted to, but last night it seemed——"

She leaned toward me, and I caught her in my arms.

Without, the moonlight fell on the mulberry trees, rows and rows of them, their branches festooned fantastically from tree to tree. They looked like figures stiffly dancing to an old-time minuet.

(2)

THE END

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